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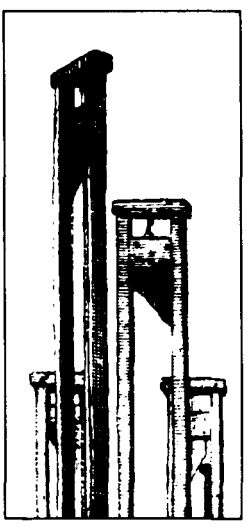

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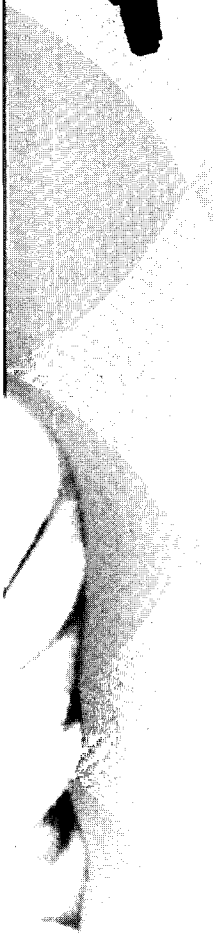

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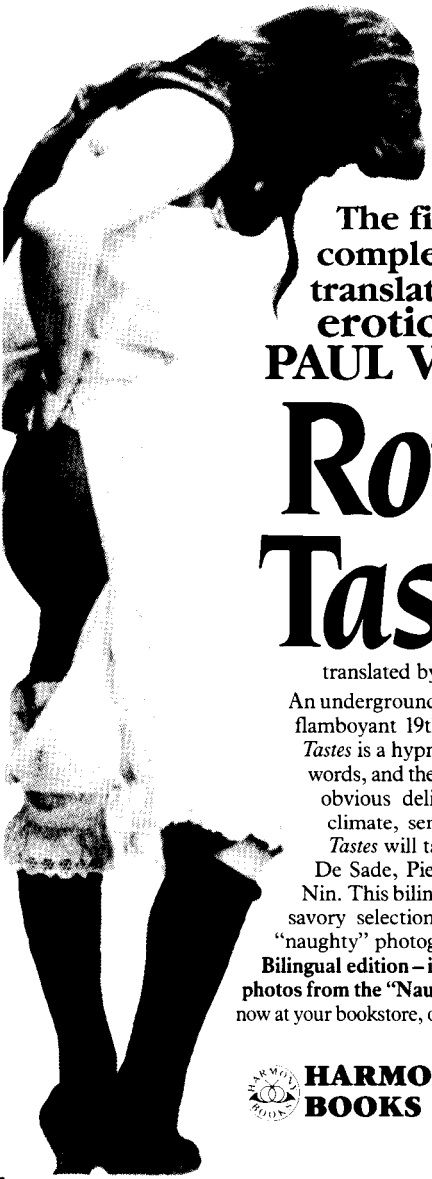

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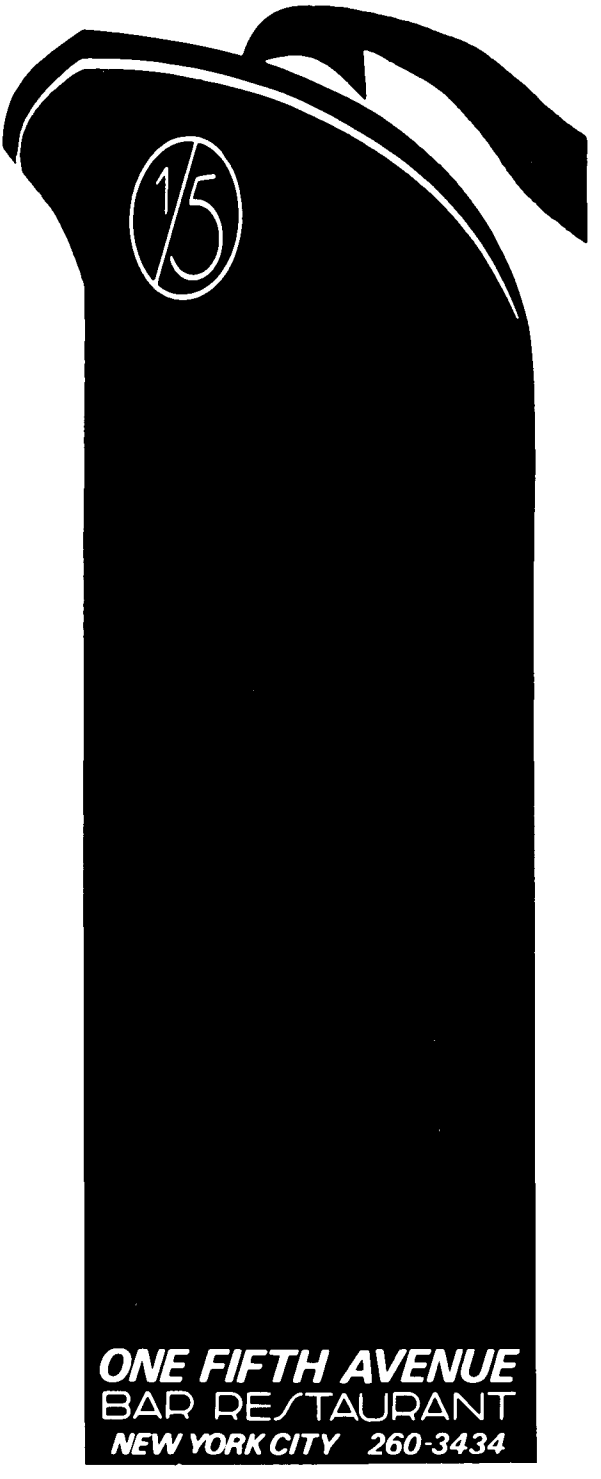

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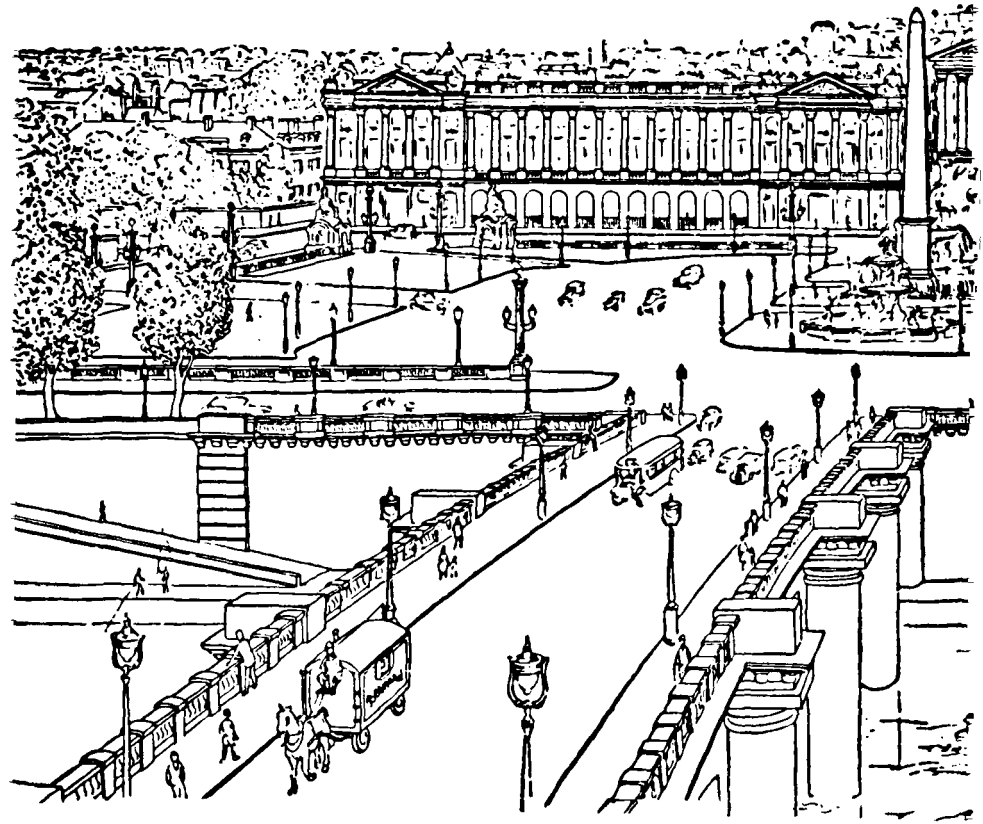

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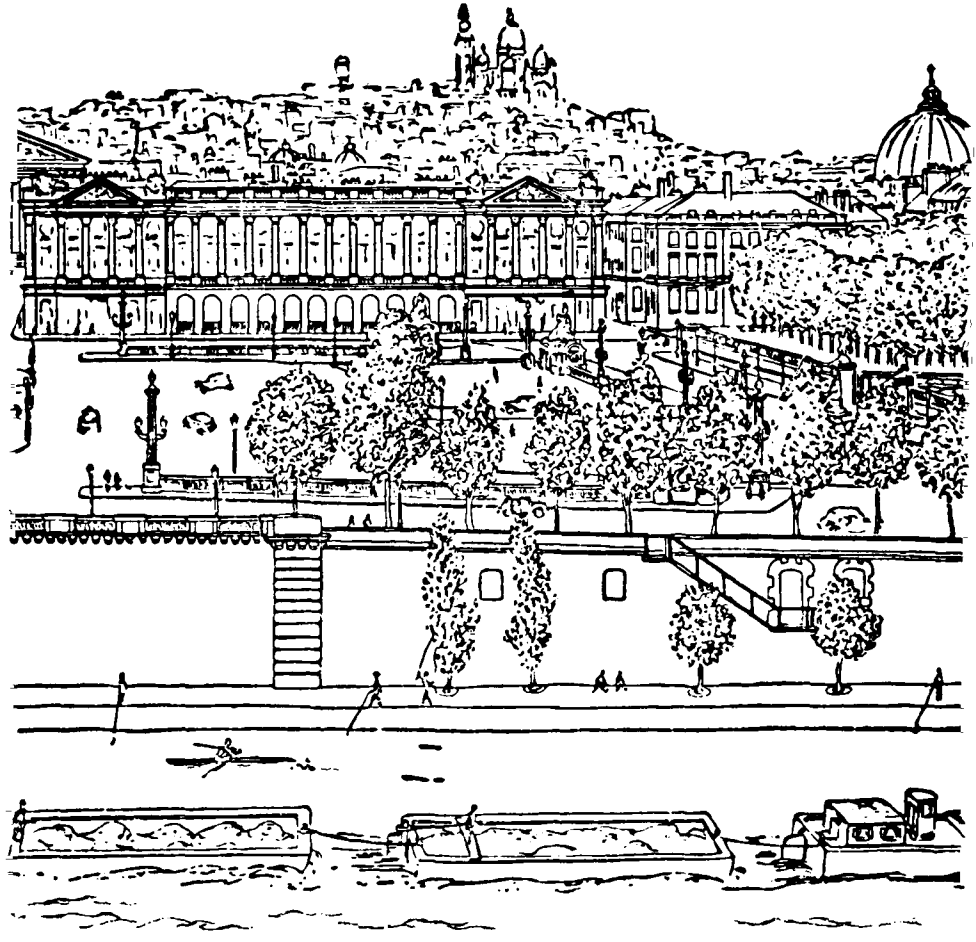

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Number 93

	Interviews	
Julio Cortázar	*The Art of Fiction LXXXIII*	173
Eugene Ionesco	*The Art of Theater VI*	53
Philip Roth	*The Art of Fiction LXXXIV*	215
	Fiction	
T. Coraghessan Boyle	*The Hector Quesadilla Story*	253
Lars Gufstafsson	*Water Story*	23
Bobbie Ann Mason	*Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?*	79
Norman Rush	*Instruments of Seduction*	146
	Art	
Laurie Simmons	*Tourism*	93
Terry Winters	*Siren: Nine Drawings*	197
	Poetry	
Sharona Ben-Tov	*Carillon for Cambridge Women*	192
Harold Brodkey	*To Frank O'Hara*	207
Joseph Brodsky	*Gorbunov and Gorchakov*	102
Raymond Carver	*Ten Poems*	37
Linda Gregg	*Six Poems*	169
Herbert Morris	*In the Dark*	248
Molly Peacock	*Four Poems*	161
Frederick Seidel	*Elms*	213
David Shapiro	*House (Blown Apart)*	212
Anne Waldman	*Canzone*	209
Baron Wormser	*Three Poems*	165
	Notes on Contributors	267

The Paris Review is pleased to welcome Jeanne McCulloch as the new Managing Editor. She replaces Hallie Gay Walden, the Managing Editor from 1981–1984.

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NOTICE

This issue commemorates the thirtieth anniversary of *The Paris Review.* It has arrived a year late, but that is a distinct improvement on the special twenty-fifth anniversary issue which in 1981 appeared *three* years later than it should have. If we can continue to improve at this rate, our actuaries tell us that the hundredth anniversary issue will appear twenty-eight years in *advance* of the proper date.

As has been noted in the past, this magazine's masthead ranks among the longest of any in the periodical field—with only *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Rolling Stone* (the champion, 155 people at this writing) ahead of it. The reason, which has also been stated, is that once involved with the magazine, it is extremely difficult to extricate oneself—rather like being stuck in a bramble bush. The hope is, of course, that those honored by being on the masthead will feel obliged to subscribe. Alas, this is not so. If everyone on the masthead subscribed—which is one of the reasons it is so long—the magazine would obviously be reaching out to a larger and more discerning audience.

Now it turns out that *The Paris Review*, along with its immense masthead, has yet another distinctive feature: it offers more *prizes* than any other literary or even non-literary publication. Namely, four. *The New Yorker* offers no prizes at all. Neither does *Esquire* or the *National Review. Partisan* doesn't. *The Atlantic Monthly* discontinued its Atlantic Firsts. *The New York Post* offers Wingo. In sum, very small potatoes indeed.

The first of *The Paris Review*'s prizes was established by His Highness Prince Aga Khan, the famous figure who was periodically weighed in jewels which he could then take home. The father of the first publisher of the magazine, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, he presented the prize ($500 back then) as an annual award for the best short story. Indeed, he submitted two

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of his own (quaint, somewhat Somerset Maughamish in tone) which were carefully considered but did not win. The judges, fazed not a whit by the Aga Khan entries, were Saul Bellow, Brendan Gill, and Hiram Hayden. They divided the prize between Gina Berriault and John Langdon whose stories appear in issue #12, famous also for its interview with William Faulkner. The extraordinary quality evinced by that first contest is suggested by the list of "Honorable Mentions," many of whose entries were published in subsequent issues: Evan S. Connell Jr., Nadine Gordimer, Frederick Morton, Terry Southern and Richard Yates, among others. The Aga Khan's son, Sadruddin, continues the prize today in memory of his father. Other winners of the Aga Khan contest over the years have included Philip Roth, Albert Guerard, Jeremy Larner, Christina Stead, Paul West, Lamar Herrin, and T. Coraghessan Boyle.

The second of *The Paris Review* prizes was established in 1959. Called the Gertrude Vanderbilt Humor Prize, it was donated by the wife of a great benefactor of the magazine in the hope (as she put it) she could read something "less gloomy" when her copy arrived. The first winner, ironically enough, was a section of Terry Southern's novel, *The Magic Christian*, about a billionaire who uses his money in bizarre and erratic ways, largely *pour épater la bourgeoisie*. Mrs. Vanderbilt could hardly have found these episodes "gloomy," but nor were they what she had in mind and the prize was discontinued in 1969. Winners in this brief span included (besides Mr. Southern) Bowden Broadwater and Hughes Rudd (another tie), Stanley Elkin, Rosalyn Drexler, Mordecai Richler, and Paul Spike.

In 1979, Bernard F. Conners, who was the second publisher of *The Paris Review*, established a poetry prize in his name for a poem of over three hundred lines. To date there have been four winners: Frank Bidart, Gerald Stern, C.K. Williams, and Sharona Ben-Tov. The Ben-Tov poem appears in this commemorative issue. The long Brodsky poem, also in this issue, was not in contention, being a translation. Perhaps someone upon reading this will come forward and offer an annual award for *that* honorable practice.

Also appearing in this issue is the first winner of the humor

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prize, which has been re-established. It is now called the John Train Humor Prize, donated by *The Paris Review*'s first managing editor, who has been a subscriber—setting a fine example for other masthead habitués—since he left the magazine in 1955. The story (which was selected by four judges: Brendan Gill, Lewis Lapham, John Train himself, and the undersigned) is by T. Coraghessan Boyle who, as recounted, also won the Aga Khan prize—the first double winner in the magazine's history.

Also, next spring, yet *another* prize will be offered, this one by the magazine itself, $1000 for the best story submitted from the various summer writing programs. Details will follow in a future issue. It is unlikely T. Coraghessan Boyle will win a triple crown—being problematic that he attends such institutions at this stage of his career—but, on the other hand, our readership should be alerted: he's at work on a book of long poems and could be a contender for the Bernard F. Conners prize.

It should be mentioned that the winner of the 1984 Aga Khan Prize for Fiction will be announced in the next issue.

On the magazine's thirtieth anniversary, it seems appropriate enough to divulge all this information about prizes.

—**G.A.P.**

The editors are pleased to announce that "Careful," by Raymond Carver, and "Cigarette Boat," by Barbara Milton, have been chosen for inclusion in *The Pushcart Prize, IX: Best of the Small Presses (1984–85)*, edited by Bill Henderson. Also noted were "Crystal River," by Charlie Smith, "Confessional," by Frank Bidart, "The Oxymoron as Taoist Vision," by Baron Wormser, and "Zelda: A Worksheet," edited by Lane Yorke.

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Water Story

Lars Gufstafsson

One afternoon during the rainy and cold summer of 1977, I set out with my son Joen in a white painted, but very leaky motorboat, out of Åmänningen at Flödhall, through Virsbo Lock, where the big trucks rumble over the bridge and where the children splash in the sluice basin, through Virsbo Lake which is longish and flat, into the swampy delta between Virsbo and Seglingsberg, where twelve wild geese flew up in front of the bow and where a wonderful pair of cranes crossed our path, past Bo Stenar, where the fishermen sit as they have been sitting for centuries with their fishing rods, right where the stream is the narrowest and the stream channel deep, sitting so close together that they conceal the red paint stain on the rock that is a landmark on the canal's starboard side, and all the ore boat and barge skippers curse them—as we did when, at the last second, we discovered that we were forced to squeeze between two outlying boulders; but everything went all right and we continued through Seglingsberg and Färmansbo locks and noticed that Färmansbo had gotten a chubby, pretty lockkeeper who spoke with a Finnish accent

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and had a huge cat and a small child playing near the water, both carefully protected from falling down into the deep inconstancy by an enclosure of wood, and at dusk we came through the last river bend out onto Norra Nadden, the lake of my youth.

"It's so little," said Joen, who had always heard it described as large, and I, poor absent-minded father in faded jeans and bare feet, feeling chilly from having stayed for hours in the tea-brown humus water, which the whole time was leaking into the boat somewhere astern, I suddenly discovered how right he was. So confined, so melancholy, the lake of my childhood, with the slowly decaying sawmill to the north, the cleared forests, barely concealed by so-called shore trees to the west, and the small idyllic summer villas of Brattheden to the east. The only thing that had remained the same was the swampland to the north, that water labyrinth of reeds and red water-lilies where, sometimes, cranes could still be heard. So little, so confined. And while we filled up with gasoline from the five-liter gas can—through the old blue funnel which had disappeared in the spring storm of 1974 but was found again in the nettles at Kyrkviken in June of 1977, a faithful old funnel—it occurred to me to begin telling a story.

"You're looking at a small melancholy lake which is in the process of growing again," I began. "You see a sawmill which is becoming a ruin, and you see a few small, weathered summer huts on a ridge, grown over for the most part. You have to understand that I see something else. In my childhood memory, it swarms with people here. Students in white suits and caps carefully row young girls between clumps of reeds and talk modestly with them. The trains, belching out black smoke, pull into stations and drop off swarms of travelers from Stockholm, among them my eccentric uncles and aunts . . ."

"Half of them exist only in your novels," said Joen, who had just reached puberty and had begun to take on lofty airs.

"I see old workers who sit on their verandas in the twilight,"

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I continued nonchalantly, "who scrape out their pipes with a nail and tell stories of fathers and grandfathers, stories that are so old that they go back to the eighteenth century, stories about charcoal burners' huts and foundry proprietors who are so malicious that the devil himself fetches them on Christmas night, and stories about the big mysterious fish, the Giant Catfish of Bo Cauldron, the Great Fish, the Original Fish, who hides in the depths where the sunlight only makes its way down like one star among others, the Inexorable Fish, who severs all lead lines with a single gnash of his huge teeth so that rope and chain alike come up to the surface again, neatly cut off."

"Why does he do that?" asked Joen, a modern young man who doesn't approve of long stories. He's in a hurry to get to the end, as if there were going to be something remarkable right at the end.

"Why does he do that?" asked Joen again. "What is it he's really hiding?"

"There is gold down there in the depths; far down something inconceivably rich glistens, the darkness possesses something, and the Catfish is the monster that protects and hides it. Never, never will any living person bring the gold up to the surface. The monster would rather die than give up the gold. He would rather die than show himself.

"Unlike the common sea monsters we read about in the newspapers, the Loch Ness Monster, the Great Sea Beast or whatever he's called, the Giant Catfish of Bo Cauldron is a sea monster whose whole existence consists in his never showing himself."

Hardly was the philosophizing over before we were going northward again between darkening clumps of reeds. We were in a bit of a hurry since we were just about to miss the lock times. It was the beginning of August; the summer light was on a rapid retreat. As Joen steered through the increasingly abstract landscape, I took care of the bailing. Frightened ducks fluttered in front of the bow; a hawk stood almost still over

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the forest edge, but there were no pairs of cranes this time. In the lockkeeper's house at Färmansbo there was a yellow, friendly, inviting light. By mustering all our charm we succeeded in borrowing the lock key. It was already so dark that the white water appeared to light up by itself. Uneasy bats whirred above the sluice basin.

"Here, as a child, or a little boy, I often ran on the banks and fished," I said. "There is a kind of morel here, small and black, that you don't find anywhere else in the district. They can only be eaten after parboiling. They grow in the old slag piles. A hut once used to be there."

We got out onto Åmänningen at the last moment. The canal behind us began to get dark, but in front of us lay the large lake reflecting the evening light. Everything was very still. Our wake spread out like a theorem in a complete geometry, and another grebe dove in front of us, abruptly, as if it had been thinking of something else. Outside Dentist Point—a desolate wooded point that got its name because a dentist once built a summer cottage there—near the little islet called Gärholmen, we noticed something peculiar that caused Joen to idle the motor.

From Gärholmen a canoe put out, evidently with only one person aboard. It passed between the hazardous sharp rocks at Enträ as if they didn't exist, and turned in quickly towards Kyrkviken. The distance was so great that it was impossible to see who was paddling, but the manner of paddling was somehow disquieting, hectic.

"For heaven's sake, what kind of person was that!" I said.

"That's odd," said Joen. "Let's go into Gärholmen and take a look. I have a feeling something strange might have happened."

"It's so dark," I said.

"But I still want us to go into Gärholmen. Besides, I hid some crowns under a rock on the middle of the island when we were skating long distance last February."

He still had the little boy's mania of hiding things under rocks, especially on islands, perhaps so that he could become invulnerable, perhaps to leave something behind, perhaps only

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to create a mystery for himself.

We approached the island at half throttle. It is a very little, narrow islet. There are so many wicked, sharp rocks in the water around it that I almost never put in to it by boat. On the other hand, it is an excellent halting place in the winter, during the first few days after Christmas when the ice is hard and blue-black because no snow has fallen yet. It was almost dark now. Just when we began to come in among the really dangerous sunken rocks, we caught sight of something that had to be a swimming animal, perhaps an elk, on its way from the island toward Kyrkviken, heading in the same direction the canoe had gone. I made a careful ninety-degree turn and, with Joen searching for dark brown boulders—which at any time could begin to rise toward the surface, unreal, solid only at the moment they come in contact with the bow—I stood and peered over the water. It was too small to be an elk; it was too large to be a swimming snake. Thirty meters away, we realized that it was a person. He had quite dark hair which was slicked down over a rather small head. He was purposely, but rather slowly making his way toward land, apparently completely naked.

Were we interrupting?

He was fairly deep in the water. He was swimming very slowly in a relentless way. He should have discovered us by now. I made up my mind. We were barely up to him before I saw that the man was exhausted.

We pulled him on board as best we could. Anyone knows that it's not an especially easy matter; a person pulled up into the back of a motorboat, and who barely makes any effort to help himself, is easily scraped on the chest. We laid him down on the bottom of the boat and put my wool sweater over him.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

He seemed too exhausted to answer.

"What shall we do with him?" Joen asked.

"We'll take him home," I said.

"He's really freezing," said Joen. "I think we should take him to Gärholmen and make a fire."

On Gärholmen, sure enough, we found a tent. A white gas

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stove stood in front of the tent and some clothes were hanging up to dry over a low branch on a fir tree. We put as much on him as we could, and made a fire with the dry sticks that were farthest in under the spruces near the tent.

The first thing he said when he was able to speak again was, "There's no danger. She'll come back. She always comes back."

"Okay," I said. "But then maybe it was a little excessive to swim after her all the way to Kyrkviken. The water gets colder faster than you'd think here in Västmanland. If you aren't an experienced distance swimmer it makes sense to take it easy."

He didn't appear to be listening. He could have been around thirty-five or forty, a fairly pleasant aspect, fairly commonplace too. You could perhaps imagine some sort of intellectual profession, but not anything that carried authority. A mark above the nose indicated that normally he wore glasses—of a thinly-curved type I would guess. He was still shivering and crawled closer to the fire. There really was nothing to indicate that he was particularly crazy, even desperate. He didn't even seem unhappy, just frozen. So I went down to the shore to see to the boat; I had a distinct feeling that the wind had changed.

Quite right. The boat was knocking into the rocks, and I took care to pull it over into the shelter of a large boulder at the shore's edge. Now it was so dark that the nearest trees were illuminated by the fire in front of the tent. On the clothesline I discerned some female underwear, and the two shapes, my son and the stranger, were now bent a little further over the fire. When I got closer, I saw that they had begun to heat water.

"I thought I would offer you a little coffee by way of thanks for the help," the man said. "Of course, it'll only be instant coffee."

"I wonder if you have a little bread and butter," I said. "You see, we've been up and down the canal the entire afternoon."

"Sure," said the swimmer. "I think I even have a bit of excellent Finnish juniper-smoked sausage from Arvid Nordquist." Bread and sausage came forth. I have to admit that we helped ourselves rather uninhibitedly.

"So you're from Stockholm?" I asked.

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"I was born in this area," he said. "A little farther down the canal, just above Kolbäck. My father had a farm there. I went to school in Västerås. I wonder whether we haven't seen each other at the gymnasium in Västerås. What year did you graduate?"

"1955," I said.

"I was there a little earlier," he said. "I graduated in 1950. Then I was a teacher for a time, but that didn't work out. Those were the very worst years—at the beginning of the sixties. There wasn't a chance of maintaining discipline in the classroom. Then I was in the travel business. I was in Athens for a long time as a representative for a charter operation. Now I've been back in Stockholm for seven years." He paused again. I tried in vain to light one of my damp matches.

"It is fantastic how you can get entangled during a lifetime," he said.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I met her for the first time in Stockholm at the end of the fifties," he said. "It must have been 1959, or something like that. I remember that the National Museum had just begun with their summer evening concerts, because right after we met, we went to one of them. The summer of 1959 was very hot and dry, if I remember correctly. There were still quite a few streetcar lines in the city. We came out of that concert and the city was warm, deserted, empty in a strange way. We were the only ones. We took a streetcar up to Söder, we walked for a long time along the Söder Mälar shore. I remember that wonderful elder in Skinnarvik Park, above Heleneborg Street. It was in bloom and smelled absolutely glorious. We must have been fantastically happy."

"Where did you meet originally?"

"That's probably not so important," he said, almost offended at my way of interrupting him. "I think it was in a seminar at the college. I really don't remember anymore. I have a feeling that I've known her forever. She was quite a shy, slender little girl then. Intelligent, but shy. She was afraid of saying anything in seminars. I was also quite shy. I'd slept with girls before her,

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but she was the first one I really had the feeling of possessing—she belonged to me; I could do what I wanted with her. You see what I mean?"

I nodded.

"There was something strange between us: a sort of fire, or maybe poison, like the fly agaric poison, muscarine, like bog-myrtle out on the large swamps in the vicinity of Marrsjon. When we were together it was like going into another world.

"I had a room on Horn Street that summer. I was supposed to be studying for one of my last big history exams. Not much got read. Often, we locked ourselves in my room for days at a stretch; we wriggled around with each other like some sort of creatures at the bottom of a deep sea. I mean, the reality above wasn't much more than that flicker of light that sea creatures must see above themselves, that flicker of light through dark brown, humus-rich water.

"As I said, the two of us were really shy to begin with. I don't think I knew especially much about how to satisfy a woman in those days. I remember that I wondered why she was so restless at times. Naturally, it didn't take very long before this shyness passed. She had fantastic orgasms; they could practically go up to her shoulders. Like cramps that shook the whole body."

"Think of the young man," I said.

"No danger. He's fallen asleep. I'll get a sweater to put on him. You don't have to go yet? It wouldn't hurt him to rest awhile after such a long excursion? You see, it feels a little lonely just now. And, strictly speaking, you are the only connection I have with the mainland."

"Okay," I said. "The boy can sleep awhile."

"We also had bouts of depression together. Strange, white melancholies. I think it has to be that way in such situations. We could take a walk out into the city at eleven o'clock, make our way carefully down Horn Street—I say carefully for in that state we often had a feeling of walking on glass the whole way. It's a little hard to explain. So we would walk down Horn Street with the firm and definite intention of buying food for lunch, and come back with a little crisp bread and cheese. It was an

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extremely peculiar state. A kind of great metaphysical absent-mindedness, a feeling that the whole world was after all completely meaningless, and that we alone had discovered it. Do you understand? Not the usual feeling that what you *do* is meaningless, but a much greater one: That existence in its entirety had lost its meaning, you'd gone through all the phases that were possible to go through, and there was nothing there.

"Our acquaintances began to wonder where we had gone. I suspect that they had given up hope for us at the university. It was all a short time, just a couple of months, and very frantic. And deep inside us, the whole time, we both had the feeling that it wouldn't last long. We made several attempts to work together. That wasn't easy. I had only one room and a kitchen, and between the kitchen and the room there arose such strange stress that the walls creaked when we tried to stay away from each other long enough to at least read a book for three or four hours.

"When fall came, we both saw that it was a bit dangerous. It wouldn't do to increase it further. Nor was there a right way back—I mean, back to the level where you carry on normal conversations with each other.

"I remember the morning she left. I had packed up all of her things for her. She couldn't do it herself—the departure stunned her. It was as if, at the last second, she had come upon something important, something entirely different that was left to do. For what reason, Heaven knows, perhaps because she had to carry quite a lot of luggage that had piled up over two and a half months, we had called a taxi, and I was standing up in the window waiting for it to come. Why didn't I stand down below? Why didn't I say goodbye to her down on the street? Just think, it's an affair that is absolutely impossible to remember after so many years. A reasonable idea, of course, is that we had had a terrible quarrel, but that cannot be so. There may have been some sort of understanding. I must have gone into my room for a moment; I remember that.

"Somehow, I discovered that she had forgotten one thing, her umbrella, her little red umbrella. I remember that I called

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out through the window, 'Shall I come down with it?' And she answered, 'Just throw it down!' There are such departures, whether you believe it or not."

"I believe it," I said.

"Have you noticed a peculiar feature on the topographic map of northern Västmanland?" he asked.

"No. What do you mean?"

He went in and got a sheet out of the text, *Västerås NV*, as it's called, scale 1:50,000. "Yes, almost every single one of the small lakes has a diminutive twin that is a bog. Look here, Acktjärn, and very close by, Acktjärn's bog. St. Grill Lake, Grill Lake Bog. Everywhere you'll find such a modest shadow of a lake that is a bog. It is, if you want, the lake that once was—the major lake that once existed.

"But the bog is still there. Below the bog-myrtle and the meadow-sweet and the cotton grass and the cloudberry tufts, there is still water, even though it can no longer reflect the sky in the same way as the lake can. It's still there. And then? What happens below the surface? What does a lake that has become a bog reflect?"

"Itself?"

"Or another sky. A sky of peat? Have you thought about the mushrooms, about how different they are from the phanerogams? Much closer to the earth, much more, how shall I say it, dramatic in their whole appearance—with all their odd poisons, their way of growing lightning fast over a couple of nights. And their way of dying, a kind of decomposition from within. They look completely whole long after they have died."

"Don't forget that they leave their threads behind in the earth, which always shoot out new bodies. A mycelium. The most interesting thing about mushrooms is that which we almost never see—that is, their underground threads."

"I've thought about that," he said.

"And how are you yourself? Are you alive or dead?"

"She appeared over the horizon," he said. "I saw her occasionally, sometimes at a party, sometimes alone. Later she got married to some kind of an expert, Heaven knows in what, and went to the U.S.

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"I think we exchanged a few letters and I remember them as quite indifferent. I took myself, so to speak, back to the point where I had been interrupted. I think that was damn smart of me. I married a decent girl and had some children. Now she is married to a forester here in the district. It was she who lost interest in me rather than the other way around. Besides, it was at the same time that I left teaching.

"Yes, then came the years in Athens. They were quite pleasant. You know, a local office like that is the right place to learn about the country and, I'd say, the right place to learn to do business with Greeks. They have somewhat different rules of the game than we have; it costs a little to learn that system and when you know both systems you can do rather interesting things. Naturally, the risk in such a situation is that you live a little too well. You drink quite a bit. You live fast. You become lax in various ways. You become just like the steamboat commissioners out on the small islands in the Aegean Sea, like small sovereigns who rule over the neighborhood from some café, where they stand behind a modest counter and have the helpers polish the brass while they think about freight and real estate prices and cement transport. Suddenly it can become very empty. You understand, the most frightful thing I know is emptiness.

"You know, suddenly a dry piece of paper rustles off along a street in the stubborn August wind, an old newspaper that someone has dropped or thrown away—southern countries where everything is dry, where everything that is left behind is more obvious than in the northern countries, the summer wind rushes in the plane trees. You look up for a moment and are very frightened by your own emptiness. You ask yourself what you're doing. Do you understand?"

He asked the last question with such zeal, almost pigheadedness, that I became uneasy. Occasionally the boy started in his sleep and I seriously began to wonder whether it wasn't time to wake him and go home. Then I was struck by how childish this impulse to flee was, how strongly dictated by weaknesses in myself, and I answered, "Naturally I understand it. I sometimes persuade myself that it is at such moments that we see truth in the white of the eye."

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"What do you mean?"

"Just think, is it such emptiness that is the truth about the world? Take this lake here for example. Certain days when I am distressed, I will take a walk down to the shore. The rocks lie out there, huge and heavy, each one like an assertion that doesn't allow itself to be refuted. At such moments, I see that the lake has always been distressed. The natural world is that way. It's just us who try to create meaning."

It became silent for a spell. Then quite suddenly he continued his story. "I don't think I had thought one moment about her for ten years, then one day she walked into my office in Athens. She wanted to change her ticket. I was in an inner room and heard one of my assistants squabbling with her outside; he tried to explain that on a charter trip, you can't change the booking in any way.

"I was on the telephone, I think I was talking to Stockholm, and suddenly I heard her voice out there. It was quite sombre; it has always been a little drawling. It is a voice that is difficult to mistake. I went out like a sleepwalker, and there she stood. It was obvious that she was married; in any case, she had a wedding ring, and it was obvious that she was there with some guy who was not the one she was married to.

"I immediately rewrote the tickets. Now they wanted to stay an extra week. They wanted to go over to Poros. I told them that it is not always so easy to find a hotel on Poros in the middle of the Greek Easter. I asked for their hotel in Athens so I could phone it. The guy seemed totally insignificant to me, a dainty clod quite simply. I managed to ask her how she was. 'Fine,' she said, 'you can see that.'

" 'That's great,' I said. 'Too bad we don't have time for a drink. We could go down to Syntagma and drink a coffee.'

" 'We haven't time,' she said. 'We have promised to meet some acquaintances at four o'clock.'

" 'That's too bad anyhow, after all these years,' I said.

"I was the last one in the office as usual, going through a few things that I always used to go through. Telexes and lists of things to do and orders. I had promised to play tennis with a guy who used to play on the courts at the university. I

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remember that I thought I should just get a sandwich first, and that it was just as well to wait a bit until the worst traffic passed. Then there was a knock on the door. I went to the door and opened it. It was the doorkeeper of the building.

" 'There's a terribly persistent lady here looking for you,' he said. 'I said that you close at four and that she should come back tomorrow, but nothing helps. She just forces her way in. Do you know her?'

" 'Not really,' I said.

"I heard the clock tick. I looked at the teletype that stood completely quiet and calm under its screen of dust. I looked at the typewriters. Oh, I remember that I was thinking, there are really moments that can determine an entire life."

"And then?"

"And then, I went out and opened up. It was like opening a sluice gate. We went to her hotel and got her things. It was a little difficult to move her into my apartment, because I had a Greek girlfriend living there; we borrowed an apartment from an acquaintance for a couple of days." He looked at his watch, amused. "Yes," he said, "If she hasn't taken the train, we'll soon have her back here."

"Does she often take off like this?" I asked.

"Occasionally. To be honest, it's quite trying to be so frantically dependent on one another as we are. She thinks it's difficult to put up with. I think so too. Sometimes she's the one who runs away, sometimes it's me."

"There is a desire to be alone," I said, rather stupidly. "I mean," and I think I made the stupidity even greater in this way, "there is occasionally a desire to be unhappy."

"I still don't think you have understood this correctly," he said.

"In a way I think we live in separate worlds," I said. I thought that was a polite way of getting off the subject.

When the boy awoke, he stretched his arms in the air and yawned out loud. It took him a while to grasp where he was. He walked behind a bush to take a leak and he was away longer than I had expected. At the same time, a canoe came into the inlet, right up to my boat. It emerged almost like a phantom out of the August darkness. I was already down at the shore.

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I said hello politely. She was shorter than I had thought. In reality, not particularly beautiful. She treated me with polite indifference. Then the boy finally came; we said goodbye and pulled the boat out. It took a great deal of effort to get the old *Archimedes E 4* going. During the intervals, while I was pulling on the starter cord, Joen was sitting and jingling something in his right hand.

"What are you jingling?" I asked.

"The coins, of course. The one crown coins I hid under the rock last winter when we paused on the skating trip. I've got them now."

I often wonder how many places around the lake he has hidden such coins.

translated from the Swedish by John Weinstock

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Ten Poems by Raymond Carver

Radio Waves

for Antonio Machado

This rain has stopped, and the moon has come out.
I don't understand the first thing about radio
waves. But I think they travel better just after
a rain, when the air is damp. Anyway, I can reach out
now and pick up Ottawa, if I want, or Toronto.
Lately, at night, I've found myself
becoming slightly interested in Canadian politics
and domestic affairs. But mostly it was their music
stations I was after. I could sit here in the chair
and listen, without having to do anything, or think.
I don't have a TV, and I'd quit reading
newspapers. At night I turned on the radio.

When I came out here I was trying to absent myself
from everything. Especially literature.
What that entails, and what comes after.
There is in the soul a desire for not thinking.
For being still. Coupled with this
a desire to be strict, yes, and rigorous.
But the soul is also a smooth son of a bitch,
not always to be trusted. And I forgot that.
I listened when it said, Better to sing that which is gone
and will not return than that which is still
with us and will be with us tomorrow. Or not.
And if not, that's all right too.
It didn't much matter, it said, even if a man sang.
That's the voice I listened to.
Can you imagine somebody thinking like this?
That it's really all one and the same?

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What nonsense!
But I'd think these stupid thoughts at night
as I sat in the chair and listened to my radio.

Then, Machado, the advent of your poetry in my life!
It was a little like a middle-aged man falling
in love again. A remarkable thing to witness, perhaps,
but embarrassing, too.
Silly things like putting your picture up.
And I took your book to bed with me
and slept with it near at hand. A train went by
in my dreams one night and woke me up.
And the first thing I thought, heart racing
there in the dark bedroom, was this—
It's all right, Machado is here.
Then I could fall back to sleep again.

Today I took your book with me when I went
for my walk. "Pay attention!" you said,
when anyone asked what to do with their lives.
So I looked around and made note of everything.
Then sat down with your book in the sun, in my place
beside the river where I could see the mountains.
And I closed my eyes and listened to the sound
of the water. Then I opened them and began to read
"Abel Martin's Last Lamentations."
This morning I thought about you hard, Machado.
And I hope, even in the face of what I know about
death,
that you got the message I intended.
But it's okay even if you didn't. Sleep well. Rest.
Sooner or later I hope we'll meet.
And then I can tell you these things myself.

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The Road

What a rough night! It's either no dreams at all,
or else a dream that may or may not be
a dream portending loss. Last night I was dropped off
without a word on a country road.
A house back in the hills showed a light
no bigger than a star.
But I was afraid to go there, and kept walking.

Then to wake up to rain striking the tiles in the
courtyard.
Flowers in a vase near the window.
The smell of coffee, and you touching your hair
with a gesture like someone who has been gone for
years.
But there's a piece of bread under the table
near your feet. And a line of ants
moving back and forth from a crack in the floor.
You've stopped smiling.

Do me a favor this morning. Draw the curtains and come
back to bed.
Forget the coffee. We'll pretend
we're in a foreign country, and in love.

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Movement

Driving lickety-split to make the ferry!
Snow Creek and then Dog Creek
fly by in the headlights.
But the hour's all wrong—no time to think
about the sea-run trout there.
In the lee of the mountains
something on the radio about an old woman
who travels around inside a kettle.
Indigence is at the root of our lives, yes,
but this is not right.
Cut that old woman some slack!
For God's sake.
She's somebody's mother.
You there! It's late. Imagine yourself
with the lid coming down.
The hymns and requiems. The sense of movement
as you're borne along to the next place.

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Fear

Fear of seeing a police car pull into the drive.
Fear of falling asleep at night.
Fear of not falling asleep.
Fear of the past rising up.
Fear of the present taking flight.
Fear of the telephone that rings in the dead of night.
Fear of electrical storms.
Fear of the cleaning woman who has a spot on her cheek!
Fear of dogs I've been told won't bite.
Fear of anxiety!
Fear of having to identify the body of a dead friend.
Fear of running out of money.
Fear of having too much, though people will not believe this.
Fear of psychological profiles.
Fear of being late and fear of arriving before anyone else.
Fear of my children's handwriting on envelopes.
Fear they'll die before I do, and I'll feel guilty.
Fear of having to live with my mother in her old age, and mine.
Fear of confusion.
Fear this day will end on an unhappy note.
Fear I'll wake up and find you gone.
Fear of not loving and fear of not loving enough.
Fear that what I love will prove lethal to those I love.
Fear of death.
Fear of living too long.
Fear of death.
I've said that.

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Woolworth's, 1954

Where this floated up from, or why,
I don't know. But thinking about this
since just after Robert called
telling me he'd be here in a few
minutes to go clamming.

How on my first job I worked
under a man named Sol.
Fifty-some years old, but
a stockboy like I was. He'd been
there forever, and had worked his way
up to nothing. But grateful
for his job, same as I was.
He knew everything there was
to know about that dime store
merchandise, and was willing to
show me. I was sixteen, working
for six-bits an hour. Loving it
that I was. Sol taught me
what he knew. He was patient,
though it helped I learned fast.

Most important memory of that
time: opening
the cartons of women's lingerie.
Underpants, and soft, clingy things
like that. Taking it out
of cartons by the handful. Something
sweet and mysterious about those
things even then. Sol called it
"linger-ey." "Linger-ey?"
What did I know? I called it
that for a while, too. "Linger-ey."

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Then got older. Quit being
a stockboy. Started pronouncing
that frog word right.
I knew what I was talking about!
Went to taking girls out
in hopes of touching that softness,
slipping down those underpants.
And sometimes it happened! God,
they let me. And they *were*
linger-ey, those underpants.
They tended to linger a little,
sometimes, as they slipped down
off the belly, clinging lightly
to the hot white skin!
Passing over the hips and buttocks
and beautiful thighs, traveling
faster now as they crossed the knees,
the calves! Reaching the ankles,
brought together for this
occasion. And kicked free
onto the floor of the car and
forgotten about. Until you had
to look for them.

"Linger-ey."

Those sweet girls!
"Linger a little, for thou art fair."
I know who said that. It fits,
and I'll use it. Robert and his
kids and I out there on the flats
with our buckets and shovels.
His kids, who won't eat clams, cutting
up the whole time, saying "Yuck,"
or, "Ugh," as clams turned
up in the shovels full of sand

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and were tossed into the bucket.
Me thinking all the while
of those early days in Yakima.
And smooth-as-silk underpants.
The lingering kind that Jeanne wore,
and Rita, Muriel, Sue, and her sister,
Cora Mae. All those girls.
Grownup now. Or worse.
I'll say it: Dead.

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The Ashtray

> You could write a story about this ashtray,
> for example, and a man and a woman. But
> the man and woman are always the two poles
> of your story. The North Pole and the South.
> Every story has these two poles—*he* and *she*.
>
> —A.P. Chekhov

They're alone at the kitchen table in her friend's
flat. They'll be alone for another hour, and then
her friend will be back. Outside, it's raining—
the rain coming down like needles, melting last week's
snow. They're smoking and using the ashtray. . . . Maybe
just one of them is smoking. . . . *He's* smoking! Never
mind. Anyway, the ashtray is filling up with
cigarettes and ashes during this painful conversation.

She's ready to break into tears at any minute.
To plead with him, in fact, though she's proud
and has never asked for anything in her life.
He sees what's coming, recognizes the signs—
a catch in her voice as she brings her fingers
to her locket, the one her mother left her.
He pushes back his chair, gets up, goes over to
the window. . . . He wishes it were tomorrow and he
were at the races. He wishes he was out walking,
using his umbrella. . . . He strokes his moustache
and wishes he were anywhere except here. But
he doesn't have any choice in the matter. He's got
to put a good face on this for everybody's sake.
God knows, he never meant for things to come
to this. But it's sink or swim now. A wrong
move and he stands to lose her friend, too.

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Her breathing slows. She watches him but
doesn't say anything. She knows, or thinks she
knows, where this is leading. She passes a hand
over her eyes, leans forward and puts her head
in her hands. She's done this a few times
before, but has no idea it's something
that drives him wild. He looks away and grinds
his teeth. He lights a cigarette, shakes out
the match, stands a minute longer at the window.

Then walks back to the table and sits
down with a sigh. He drops the match in the ashtray.
She reaches for his hand, and he lets her
take it. Why not? Where's the harm? he thinks.
Let her. His mind's made up. She covers his
fingers with kisses, tears fall onto his wrists.

He draws on his cigarette and looks at her
as a man would look indifferently on
a cloud, a tree, or a field of oats at sunset.
He narrows his eyes against the smoke. From time
to time he uses the ashtray as he waits
for her to finish weeping.

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Afghanistan

The sad music of roads lined with larches.
The forest in the distance resting under snow.

The Khyber Pass. Alexander the Great.
History, and lapis lazuli.

No books, no pictures, no knick-knacks please me.
But she pleases me. And lapis lazuli.

That blue stone she wears on her dear finger.
That pleases me exceedingly.

The bucket clatters into the well.
And brings up water with a sweet taste to it.

The towpath along the river. The footpath
Through the grove of almonds. My love

Goes everywhere in her sandals.
And wears lapis lazuli on her finger.

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Still Looking Out for Number One

Now that you've gone away for five days,
I'll smoke all the cigarettes I want,
where I want. Make biscuits and eat them
with jam and fat bacon. Loaf. Indulge
myself. Walk on the beach if I feel
like it. And I feel like it, alone and
thinking about when I was young. The people
then who loved me beyond reason.
And how I loved them above all others.
Except one. I'm saying I'll do everything
I want here while you're away!
But there's one thing I won't do.
I won't sleep in our bed without you.
No. It doesn't please me to do so.
I'll sleep where I damn well feel like it—
where I sleep best when you're away
and can't hold you the way I do.
On the broken sofa in my study.

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Hominy and Rain

In a little patch of ground beside
the wall of the Earth Sciences building,
a man in a canvas hat was on
his knees doing something in the rain
with some plants. Piano music
came from an upstairs window
in the building next door.
Then the music stopped.
And the window was brought down.

You told me those white blossoms
on the cherry trees in the Quad
smelled like a can of just-opened
hominy. Hominy. They reminded you
of that. This may or may not
be true. That they smelled like that.
Those blossoms. I can't say.
I've lost my sense of smell,
along with any interest I may ever
have expressed in working
on my knees with plants, or
vegetables. There was a barefoot

madman with a ring in his ear
playing his guitar and singing
reggae. I remember that.
Rain puddling around his feet.
The place he'd picked to stand
had Welcome Fear
painted on the sidewalk in red letters.

At the time it seemed important
to recall the man on his knees
in front of his plants.

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The blossoms. The music of one kind,
and another. Now, I'm not so sure.
I can't say, for sure.

It's a little like some tiny cave-in,
in my brain. There's a sense
that I've lost—not everything,
not everything, but far too much.
A part of my life forever.
Like hominy.

Even though your arm stayed linked
in mine. Even though that. Even
though we stood quietly in the
doorway as the rain picked up.
And watched it without saying
anything. Stood quietly.
At peace, I think. Stood watching
the rain. While the one
with the guitar played on.

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Romanticism

(For my friend Linda Gregg,
after reading "Classicism")

The nights are very unclear here.
But if the moon is full, we know it.
We feel one thing one minute,
something else the next.

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bornée à ce conflit simple, – il n'y aurait rien eu de nouveau, de vrai, de profond, – mais une réalité grossière et schématique. Nous nous apercevons que tout est bien plus complexe. Et dans cette prison, un homme doit mourir être exécuté. On ne voit pas ce condamné sur la scène. Il est pourtant présent à notre conscience, infiniment obsédant. C'est le héros de la pièce. Ou plutôt : c'est la mort qui est ce héros. Gardiens et prisonniers ~~cette mort, la mort~~ ressentent ensemble, vivent cette mort, – sauf le bourreau et le vieux prisonnier : il n'y a que ces derniers qui soit déshumanisés. A part eux, l'humanité profonde de cette oeuvre réside dans la communion ~~vraie~~ ~~aussi~~ terrible de cette hantise, cette angoisse qui est celle de tous. Une union, au-delà de la désunion ; une fraternité, presque inconsciente mais dont l'auteur nous fait prendre conscience, elle se crée ou se révèle. Il est évident que cette angoisse est propre à nous tous. Les gardiens, les prisonniers sont nous, les uns et les autres, des mortels que hantent le fait essentiel qu'ils sont des mortels, – et la pièce touche à l'un des problèmes essentiels des hommes qui fait que les hommes seront des hommes. Voilà un théâtre populaire, – celui de la communion dans la même angoisse. Impopulaire, aussi, – car à Paris, du moins, le Théâtre du matin n'a pas eu

A Eugene Ionesco manuscript page.

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Eugene Ionesco's passport photograph.

The Art of Theater VI
Eugene Ionesco

The last two years have been exceptionally busy for Eugene Ionesco. His seventieth birthday was celebrated in 1982 with a series of events, publications, and productions of his work, not only in France but world-wide. Hugoliades, *Ionesco's satirical portrait of Victor Hugo, which he wrote at the age of twenty, was newly published by Gallimard. In Lyons, Roger Planchon, the director of the Théâtre Nationale Populaire, staged* Journey Among the Dead, *a collage of Ionesco's dreams, autobiographical writings, and extracts from his latest play,* The Man With Suitcases. *The show, which has been touring France to both critical and popular acclaim, is*

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due to be staged at the Comédie Française in Paris later this year. Meanwhile, the cast of Ionesco's two early plays, The Bald Soprano *and* The Lesson, *gave a birthday party for the playwright which also celebrated both plays' twenty-fifth year of uninterrupted runs at the Théâtre de la* Huchette *in Paris.*

Over the past thirty years, Ionesco has been called a "tragic clown," the "Shakespeare of the Absurd," the "Enfant Terrible of the Avant-Garde," and the "Inventor of the Metaphysical Farce"—epithets which point to his evolution from a young playwright at a tiny Left Bank theater to an esteemed member of the Académie Française. For the past forty-five years, Ionesco has been married to Rodika, his Romanian wife. They live in an exotic top-floor apartment on the Boulevard Montparnasse above La Coupole, surrounded by a collection of books and pictures by some of Ionesco's oldest friends and colleagues, including Hemingway, Picasso, Sartre, and Henry Miller. Our interview took place in the drawing room, where Miro's portraits, Max Ernst's drawing of Ionesco's Rhinoceros, *and a selection of Romanian and Greek icons adorn the walls.*

Ionesco, a small, bald man with sad, gentle eyes seems quite fragile at first glance—an impression which is immediately belied by his mischievous sense of humor and his passionate speech. Beside him Rodika, also slight, with dark slanted eyes and an ivory complexion, looks like a placid Oriental doll. During the course of the interview she brought us tea and frequently asked how we were getting on. The Ionescos' steady exchange of endearments and their courtesy with one another reminded me of some of the wonderful old couples portrayed by Ionesco in many of his plays.

INTERVIEWER

You once wrote, "The story of my life is the story of a wandering." Where and when did the wandering start?

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EUGENE IONESCO

At the age of one. I was born near Bucharest, but my parents came to France a year later. We moved back to Romania when I was thirteen, and my world was shattered. I hated Bucharest, its society, and its mores—its anti-Semitism for example. I was not Jewish, but I pronounced my *r*'s as the French do and was often taken for a Jew, for which I was ruthlessly bullied. I worked hard to change my *r*'s and to sound Bourguignon! It was the time of the rise of Nazism and everyone was becoming pro-Nazi—writers, teachers, biologists, historians. . . . Everyone read Chamberlain's *The Origins of the Twentieth Century* and books by rightists like Charles Maurras and Léon Daudet. It was a plague! They despised France and England because they were *yiddified* and racially impure. On top of everything, my father remarried and his new wife's family was very right-wing. I remember one day there was a military parade. A lieutenant was marching in front of the palace guards. I can still see him carrying the flag. I was standing beside a peasant with a big fur hat who was watching the parade, absolutely wide-eyed. Suddenly the lieutenant broke rank, rushed toward us, and slapped the peasant saying, "Take off your hat when you see the flag!" I was horrified. My thoughts were not yet organized or coherent at that age, but I had feelings, a certain nascent humanism, and I found these things inadmissible. The worst thing of all, for an adolescent, was to be different from everyone else. Could I be right and the whole country wrong? Perhaps there were people like that in France—at the time of the Dreyfus trials, when Paul Déroulède, the chief of the anti-Dreyfussards, wrote "En Avant Soldat!"—but I had never known it. The France I knew was my childhood paradise. I had lost it, and I was inconsolable. So I planned to go back as soon as I could. But first, I had to get through school and university, and then get a grant.

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INTERVIEWER

When did you become aware of your vocation as a writer?

IONESCO

I always had been. When I was nine, the teacher asked us to write a piece about our village *fête*. He read mine in class. I was encouraged and continued. I even wanted to write my memoirs at the age of ten. At twelve I wrote poetry, mostly about friendship—"Ode to Friendship." Then my class wanted to make a film and one little boy suggested that I write the script. It was a story about some children who invite some other children to a party, and they end up throwing all the furniture and the parents out of the window. Then I wrote a patriotic play, *Pro Patria*. You see how I went for the grand titles!

INTERVIEWER

After these valiant childhood efforts you began to write in earnest. You wrote *Hugoliades* while you were still at university. What made you take on poor Hugo?

IONESCO

It was quite fashionable to poke fun at Hugo. You remember Gide's "Victor Hugo is the greatest French poet, alas!" or Cocteau's "Victor Hugo was a madman who thought he was Victor Hugo." Anyway, I hated rhetoric and eloquence. I agreed with Verlaine who said, "You have to get hold of eloquence and twist its neck off!" Nonetheless, it took some courage. Nowadays it is common to debunk great men, but it wasn't then.

INTERVIEWER

French poetry is rhetorical, except for a few exceptions like Villon, Louise Labé, and Baudelaire.

IONESCO

Ronsard isn't. Nor are Gérard de Nerval and Rimbaud. But even Baudelaire sinks into rhetoric: "Je suis belle, Ô Mor-

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telle . . . ," and then when you see the actual statue he's referring to, it's a pompous one! Or:

Mon enfant, ma soeur,
songe à la douceur,
d'aller là-bas vivre ensemble . . .

It could be used for a brochure on exotic cruises for American millionaires.

INTERVIEWER

Come on! There were no *American* millionaires in those days.

IONESCO

Ah, but there *were*! I agree with Albert Béguin, a famous critic in the thirties [author of *Dreams and the Romantics*], who said that Hugo, Lamartine, Musset, etc . . . were *not* romantics, and that French romantic poetry really started with Nerval and Rimbaud. You see, the former produced versified rhetoric; they talked about death, even monologued on death. But from Nerval on, death became visceral and poetic. They didn't speak of death, they *died* of death. That's the difference.

INTERVIEWER

Baudelaire died of death, did he not?

IONESCO

Alright then, you can have your Baudelaire. In the theater, the same thing happened with us—Beckett, Adamov, and myself. We were not far from Sartre and Camus—the Sartre of *La Nausée*, the Camus of *L'Etranger*—but they were thinkers who demonstrated their ideas, whereas with us, especially Beckett, death becomes a living evidence, like Giacometti whose sculptures are walking skeletons. Beckett shows death; his people are in dustbins or waiting for God. (Beckett will be cross with me for mentioning God, but never mind.) Similarly, in my play *The New Tenant*, there is no speech, or rather, the speeches are given to the Janitor. The Tenant just

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suffocates beneath proliferating furniture and objects—which is a symbol of death. There were no longer words being spoken, but images being visualized. We achieved it above all by the dislocation of language. Do you remember the monologue in *Waiting for Godot* and the dialogue in *The Bald Soprano*? Beckett destroys language with silence. I do it with too much language, with characters talking at random, and by inventing words.

INTERVIEWER

Apart from the central theme of death and the black humor which you share with the other two dramatists, there is an important oneiric, or dreamlike, element in your work. Does this suggest the influence of surrealism and psychoanalysis?

IONESCO

None of us would have written as we do without surrealism and dadaism. By liberating the language, those movements paved the way for us. But Beckett's work, especially his prose, was influenced above all by Joyce and the Irish Circus people. Whereas my theater was born in Bucharest. We had a French teacher who read us a poem by Tristan Tzara one day which started, "Sur une ride du soleil," to demonstrate how ridiculous it was and what rubbish modern French poets were writing. It had the opposite effect. I was bowled over and immediately went and bought the book. Then I read all the other surrealists—André Breton, Robert Desnos . . . I loved the black humor. I met Tzara at the very end of his life. He, who had refused to speak Romanian all his life, suddenly started talking to me in that language, reminiscing about his childhood, his youth, and his loves. But you see, the most implacable enemies of culture—Rimbaud, Lautréamont, dadaism, surrealism—end up being assimilated and absorbed by it. They all wanted to destroy culture, at least organized culture, and now they're part of our heritage. It's culture and not the bourgeoisie, as has been alleged, that is capable of ab-

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sorbing everything for its own nourishment. As for the oneiric element, that is due partly to surrealism, but to a larger extent due to personal taste and to Romanian folklore—werewolves and magical practices. For example, when someone is dying, women surround him and chant, "Be careful! Don't tarry on the way! Don't be afraid of the wolf; it is not a real wolf!"—exactly as in *Exit The King*. They do that so the dead man won't stay in infernal regions. The same thing can be found in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which had a great impact on me too. However, my deepest anxieties were awakened, or reactivated, through Kafka.

INTERVIEWER

Especially the Kafka of "Metamorphosis"?

IONESCO

Yes, and of *Amerika*. Remember how his character, Karl Rossmann, goes from cabin to cabin and can't find his way? It is very oneiric. And Dostoyevsky interested me because of the way he deals with the conflict between good and evil. But all this already had happened by the time I left Bucharest.

INTERVIEWER

How did you manage to return to Paris—I believe at the age of twenty-six—and stay for good?

IONESCO

I had a degree in French literature and the French government gave me a grant to come and do a doctorate. In the meantime, I had married and was working as a teacher. My wife Rodika was one of the few people who thought the same as I did. Perhaps it's because she comes from that part of Romania which is very Asiatic—the people are small and have slit eyes. Now I'm becoming a racialist! Anyway, I was going to write a thesis on "The Theme of Death and Sin in French Poetry." There's the grand title again.

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INTERVIEWER

Did you write it?

IONESCO

Oh no! As I researched, I noticed that the French—Pascal, Péguy, etc.—had problems of faith, but they had no feeling for death and they *certainly* never felt guilty. What they had plenty of was the feeling of age, of physical deterioration and decay. From Ronsard's famous sonnet about aging, "Quand tu seras vieille . . . ," to Baudelaire's *La Charogne* (The carrion), to Zola's *Thérèse Raquin* and *Nana*—it's all degradation, decomposition, and rot. But not death. Never. The feeling of death is more metaphysical. So I didn't write it.

INTERVIEWER

Is that why you also gave up dramatizing Proust, because his preoccupation with time is different from yours?

IONESCO

Precisely. Also, *Remembrance of Things Past* is too long and difficult, and what is interesting is the seventh volume, *Time Regained*. Otherwise, Proust's work is concerned with irony, social criticism, worldliness, and the passage of time, which are not my preoccupations.

INTERVIEWER

When you settled in Paris, did you try to meet the authors whose works you had read, and get into the literary world?

IONESCO

I did research at the National Library and met other students. Later, I met Breton, who came to see my play *Amédee* in 1954. I continued seeing him until his death in 1960. But he had been dropped by the literary establishment because, unlike Aragon, Eluard, and Picasso, he refused to join the Communist Party, and so he wasn't fashionable any more.

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INTERVIEWER

You also got involved with the Collège de Pataphysique. Could you tell me about it?

IONESCO

Quite by chance, I met a man named Sainmont, who was a professor of philosophy and the founder, or *Le Providateur Général*, of the Collège de Pataphysique. Later I met Raymond Queneau and Boris Vian, who were the most important and active members. The Collège was an enterprise dedicated to nihilism and irony, which in my view corresponded to Zen. Its chief occupation was to devise commissions, whose job it was to create sub-commissions, which in turn did nothing. There was one commission which was preparing a thesis on the history of latrines from the beginning of civilization to our time. The members were students of Dr. Faustrol, who was an invented character and the prophet of Alfred Jarry. So the purpose of the Collège was the demolition of culture, even of surrealism, which they considered too organized. But make no mistake, these people were graduates of the École Normale Supérieure and highly cultured. Their method was based on puns and practical jokes—*le canular*. There is a great tradition of puns in Anglo-Saxon literature—Shakespeare, *Alice in Wonderland*—but not in French. So they adopted it. They believed that the science of sciences is the Pataphysique and its dogma, le canular.

INTERVIEWER

How was the Collège organized, and how did one join it?

IONESCO

It was organized with great precision: there was a hierarchy, grades, a pastiche of freemasonry. Anybody could join, and the first grade was that of *Auditeur Amphitéote*. After that, you became a *Regent*, and finally a *Satrap*. The Satrap was entitled to be addressed as *Votre Transcendence*, and when you left his presence you had to walk backwards. Our principal activity was to write pamphlets and to make absurd statements,

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such as, "Jean Paulhan does not exist!" Our meetings took place in a little café-restaurant in the Latin Quarter, and we discussed nothing, because we believed—and I still do—that there is no reason for anything, that everything is meaningless.

INTERVIEWER

Is that not contradictory to your religious conversion?

IONESCO

No, because we exist on several different planes, and when we said nothing had any reason we were referring to the psychological and social plane. Our God was Alfred Jarry, and, apart from our meetings, we made pilgrimages to his grave near Paris. As you know, Jarry had written *Ubu Roi*, which was a parody of *Macbeth*. Much later I wrote a play based on *Macbeth* too. Anyway, the Collège gave decorations, the most important of which was *La Gidouille*, which was a large turd to be pinned on your lapel.

INTERVIEWER

How did you acquire the honor of becoming a Satrap?

IONESCO

By writing *The Bald Soprano* and *The Lesson*, since the plays made fun of everything. They both had a conventional format—scenes, dialogue, characters—but no psychology.

INTERVIEWER

Did those at the Collège ever play a practical joke on you?

IONESCO

Yes. At the premiere of *The Bald Soprano*, twenty to thirty of them turned up wearing their gidouilles on their lapels. The audience was shocked at the sight of so many big turds, and thought they were members of a secret cult. I didn't produce many puns, but I did contribute to the *Cahiers de*

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Pataphysique, the Collège's quarterly magazine, with letters in Italian, Spanish, and German—all the languages I don't speak. The letters just sounded Italian, Spanish, and German. I wish I had kept some but I haven't. The chief makers of puns and canulars were Sainmont and Queneau. They invented a poet named Julien Torma, who of course never existed, and they published his works in the *Cahiers*. They even invented a biography for him, complete with a tragic death in the mountains.

INTERVIEWER

When did the Collège cease to exist?

IONESCO

When the founders and guiding spirits—Vian, Sainmont, and finally Queneau—began to die. There was an honorary president, a certain Baron Mollet, who was not a Baron at all, but a madman who had once been Guillaume Apollinaire's valet. But the Pataphysique is not dead. It lives on in the minds of certain men, even if they are not aware of it. It has gone into "occultation," as we say, and will come back again one day.

INTERVIEWER

To get back to your work: After you dropped your thesis in favor of your own writing, why did you choose the theater and not another literary form?

IONESCO

The theater chose me. As I said, I started with poetry, and I also wrote criticism and dialogue. But I realized that I was most successful at dialogue. Perhaps I abandoned criticism because I am full of contradictions, and when you write an essay you are not supposed to contradict yourself. But in the theater, by inventing various characters, you can. My characters are contradictory not only in their language, but in their behavior as well.

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INTERVIEWER

So in 1950 you appeared, or should I say erupted, on the French stage with *The Bald Soprano*. Adamov's plays were staged almost simultaneously, and two years later there was Beckett's *Waiting For Godot*—three avant-garde playwrights who, though very different in personality and output, had a great deal in common thematically and formally, and who later became known as the chief exponents of the "theater of the absurd." Do you agree with this appellation?

IONESCO

Yes and no. I think it was Martin Esslin who wrote a book with that title about us. At first I rejected it, because I thought that everything was absurd, and that the notion of the absurd had become prominent only because of existentialism, because of Sartre and Camus. But then I found ancestors, like Shakespeare who said, in *Macbeth*, that the world is full of sound and fury, a tale told by an idiot, *signifying nothing*. Macbeth is a victim of fate. So is Oedipus. But what happens to them is not absurd in the eyes of destiny, because destiny, or fate, has its own norms, its own morality, its own laws, which cannot be flouted with impunity. Oedipus sleeps with his Mummy, kills his Daddy, and breaks the laws of fate. He must pay for it by suffering. It is tragic and absurd, but at the same time it's reassuring and comforting, since the idea is that if we don't break destiny's laws, we should be all right. Not so with our characters. They have no metaphysics, no order, no law. They are miserable and they don't know why. They are puppets, undone. In short, they represent modern man. Their situation is not tragic, since it has no relation to a higher order. Instead, it's ridiculous, laughable, and derisory.

INTERVIEWER

After the success of *The Bald Soprano* and *The Lesson* you became suddenly and controversially famous. Were you lionized? Did you start frequenting literary salons and gatherings?

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IONESCO

Yes, I did. Literary salons don't exist any longer in Paris, but in those days there were two. The first was the salon of Madame Dézenas—a rich lady who liked literature and the arts. All sorts of celebrities came there: Stravinsky, Etiemble, young Michel Butor, Henri Michaux. . . . The second salon was La Vicomtesse de Noailles's. I went there once and met Jean-Louis Barrault. I remember how a ripple of excitement, a *frisson*, ran through the gathering when Aragon and Elsa Triolet were announced. "Here come the Communists!" they all said. Aragon was in a dinner jacket and Elsa was covered in jewelry. But *I* went there to drink whiskey and to meet friends, not out of worldliness.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think worldly distractions, social life and parties, dissipate a writer's concentration and damage his work?

IONESCO

Yes, to a certain extent. But there have been great writers who have been great partygoers at the same time, such as Valéry, Claudel, and Henry James. Valéry used to get up at five in the morning, work until nine, then spend the rest of the day having fun in one way or another.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think success can be damaging for a writer, not only as a distraction but because it could make him seek out easy options and compromises?

IONESCO

It depends on how you use it. I detest and despise success, yet I cannot do without it. I am like a drug addict—if nobody talks about me for a couple of months I have withdrawal symptoms. It is stupid to be hooked on fame, because it is like being hooked on corpses. After all, the people who come to see my plays, who create my fame, are going to die. But you can stay in society and be alone, as long as you can be

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detached from the world. This is why I don't think I have ever gone for the easy option or done things that were expected of me. I have the vanity to think that every play I have written is different from the previous ones. Yet, even though they are written in a different way, they all deal with the same themes, the same preoccupations. *Exit the King* is also *The Bald Soprano*.

INTERVIEWER

You also wrote a play called *Macbett*, which is very different from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. What made you go for a remake of the Bard?

IONESCO

My Macbett is not a victim of fate, but of politics. I agree with Jan Kott, the Polish author of *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, who gives the following explanation: A bad king is on the throne, a noble prince kills him to free the country of tyranny, but ipso facto he becomes a criminal and has to be killed in turn by someone else—and on it goes. The same thing has happened in recent history: The French Revolution liberated people from the power of the aristocrats. But the bourgeoisie that took over represented the exploitation of man by man, and had to be destroyed—as in the Russian Revolution, which then degenerated into totalitarianism, Stalinism, and genocide. The more you make revolutions, the worse it gets. Man is driven by evil instincts that are often stronger than moral laws.

INTERVIEWER

This sounds very pessimistic and hopeless and seems at variance with your mystical and religious tendencies.

IONESCO

Well, there is a higher order, but man can separate himself from it because he is free—which is what we have done. We have lost the sense of this higher order, and things will get worse and worse, culminating perhaps in a nuclear

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holocaust—the destruction predicted in the Apocalyptic texts. Only our apocalypse will be absurd and ridiculous because it will not be related to any transcendence. Modern man is a puppet, a jumping jack. You know, the Cathars [a Christian sect of the later Middle Ages] believed that the world was not created by God but by a demon who had stolen a few technological secrets from Him and made this world—which is why it doesn't work. I don't share this heresy. I'm too afraid! But I put it in a play called *This Extraordinary Brothel*, in which the protagonist doesn't talk at all. There is a revolution, everybody kills everybody else, and he doesn't understand. But at the very end, he speaks for the first time. He points his finger towards the sky and shakes it at God, saying, "You rogue! You little rogue!" and he bursts out laughing. He understands that the world is an enormous farce, a canular played by God against man, and that he has to play God's game and laugh about it. That is why I prefer the phrase "theatre of derision" which Emmanuel Jacquart used for the title of his book on Beckett, Adamov, and myself, to "theatre of the absurd."

INTERVIEWER

I think Esslin was dealing with the first period of your work—*The Bald Soprano*, *The Lesson*, *Jacques*, and *The Chairs*. With the introduction of your central character, Béranger, the plays seem to change somewhat. The dislocation of language, the black humor, and the element of farce are all still there, but not to the same degree. Instead, you develop new elements of both plot and character. How did you come to choose the name Béranger, and did the creation of this character help with the transition?

IONESCO

I wanted a very common name. Several came to my mind and I finally chose Béranger. I don't think the name means anything, but it is very ordinary and innocuous. In the first plays the characters were puppets and spoke in the third

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person as *one*, not as *I* or as *you*. The impersonal one, as in "one should take an umbrella when it is raining." They lived in what Heidegger calls "the world of one." Afterwards, the characters acquired a certain volume, or weight. They have become more individualized, psychologized. Béranger represents the modern man. He is a victim of totalitarianism—of both kinds of totalitarianism, of the Right and of the Left. When *Rhinoceros* was produced in Germany, it had fifty curtain calls. The next day the papers wrote, "Ionesco shows us how we became Nazis." But in Moscow, they wanted me to rewrite it and make sure that it dealt with Nazism and not with their kind of totalitarianism. In Buenos Aires, the military government thought it was an attack on Peronism. And in England they accused me of being a petit bourgeois. Even in the new *Encyclopaedia Britannica* they call me a reactionary. You see, when it comes to misunderstanding, I have had my full share. Yet I have never been to the Right, nor have I been a Communist, because I have experienced, personally, both forms of totalitarianism. It is those who have never lived under tyranny who call me petit bourgeois.

INTERVIEWER

The misunderstanding of your work in England and the fact that your plays have not been widely produced there or in America dates back to your quarrel with the late critic Kenneth Tynan in the early sixties.

IONESCO

That's right. I didn't much care for the Angry Young Men whose work Tynan was backing. I thought *them* very petit bourgeois and insignificant. I found their revolutionary zeal unconvincing, their anger small and personal, and their work of little interest.

INTERVIEWER

Also, Brecht was enjoying a vogue at the time, and you were definitely not Brechtian.

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IONESCO

I think that Brecht was a good producer, but not really a poet or a dramatist, except in his early plays, *Threepenny Opera*, *Baal*, and a couple of others. But his committed plays don't work. I believe that, as Nabokov said, an author should not have to deliver a message, because he is not a postman.

INTERVIEWER

Sam Goldwyn said the same thing about films, "Leave the messages to Western Union."

IONESCO

Did he say that? I quite agree. In France everybody was Brechtian—Bernard Dort, Roland Barthes—and they wanted to rule the theater. Later, Tynan asked me to write something for his erotic revue, *Oh! Calcutta!*, which I did. Then he said: "You have so much talent, you could be Europe's first dramatist." So I said, "What should I do?" and he said, "Become Brechtian." I said, "But then I would be the second, not the first."

INTERVIEWER

Now we seem to have come full circle. A Brechtian, Roger Planchon, has just produced *Journey Among The Dead*, your autobiographical play, and you are considered one of the greatest dramatists of our time. You have been sitting in the French Academy since 1970, next to some of the people who rejected your plays at first. I understand that the process of election to the Academy involves writing letters and calling on each member personally, pleading your case and asking to be elected. There are many famous rejections, like Baudelaire's heart-breaking letters to the members of the Academy, begging them to vote for him. And Zola. It seems a humiliating process. Yet you, a rebel, why did you go through with it?

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IONESCO

I didn't. There were people who wanted me there, like René Clair, Jean Delay, and others; and I said I would apply on the condition that I would not have to call on people and write letters. I simply presented my letter of candidacy and I was elected by seventeen votes against sixteen.

INTERVIEWER

How do the meetings of the Academy compare with those of the Collège de Pataphysique in the old days?

IONESCO

All the members of the Academy are pataphysicians, whether consciously, like the late René Clair, or unconsciously. Anyway, I don't go there that often, only a couple of times a year for the elections of new members, and I always vote against them!

INTERVIEWER

Against whom?

IONESCO

Against everybody! Unfortunately, I'm such a poor intriguer that I have not succeeded in keeping out certain undesirable persons, and there are people I would like to see as members who have not yet been elected. But the elections are fun. Claudel used to say that they were so amusing that there should be one every week. You see, the French Academy is an association of solitaries: Jean Delay, the inventor of modern postpsychoanalytic psychiatry; Lévi-Strauss, the creator of modern anthropology and structuralism; Louis de Broglie, one of the founders of modern physics; and George Dumézil, a great specialist in religions. These are the most cultured men in France, truly liberated minds and free spirits. I assure you, only third-rate journalists denigrate the French Academy, the petit bourgeois who think they are intellectuals and who would not dream of mocking the Soviet Academy—

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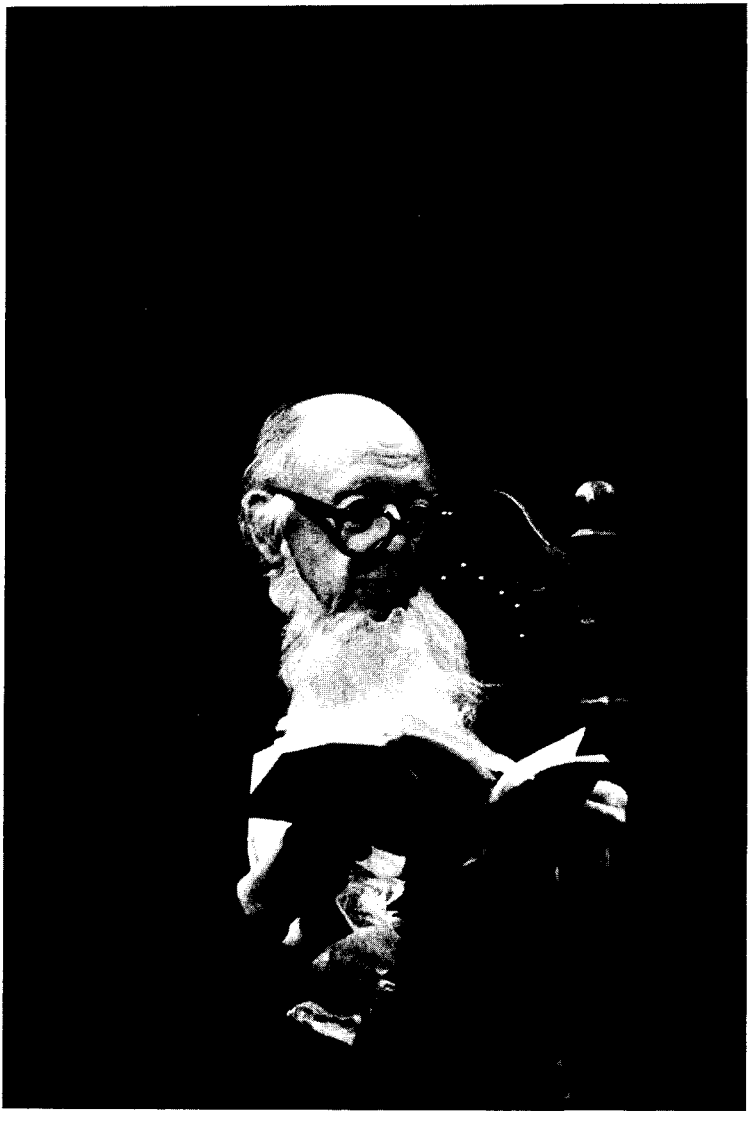

Photo © Micheline Pelletier/Gamma

Eugene Ionesco performing in Virginia Woolf's play Freshwater *in November, 1983. The production was a benefit for Amnesty International.*

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where the members must accept all manner of indignity, pay allegiance to the Communist Party, and be censured constantly.

INTERVIEWER

You said that you didn't care much for the Angry Young Men of the theater. What about those, like Pinter and Albee, whose works were clearly influenced by yours and Beckett's?

IONESCO

Pinter's first play, *The Caretaker*, was derived from Beckett and was very good. Since then, he seems to be doing what I call *du boulevard intelligent*—which is to say, he is writing clever, well-made commercial plays. In truth, these playwrights were influenced only by our language, not really by our spirit. Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* was admirable. I also liked Albee's *The Zoo Story*, but I haven't read anything in the same vein since. Several French playwrights, Dubillard and a few others, tried their hands, but it didn't really go anywhere. What we tried to do was to put man on the stage to face himself. That is why our theater was called metaphysical. In England, where people like Edward Bond write plays in which terrible things happen, it is still on the political level. The sacred and the ritual are missing. Did I tell you that I recently went to Taiwan? It is a nice American place, and everybody speaks English. But they seem to have lost touch completely with their own traditions, their own sages, and I, not a particularly erudite amateur, had to tell them about Confucius, Buddha, Zen. In the West, also, people have lost the feeling for the sacred, *le sentiment du sacré*. We tried to bring it back by going to our sources, to the theater of antiquity. In Racine, adultery is considered a very important crime, punishable by death. In the theater of the nineteenth century, adultery is a *divertissement*, an entertainment—the *only* entertainment! So although we are considered modern, too modern, even avant-garde, *we* are the real classicists, not the writers of the nineteenth century.

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INTERVIEWER

After four plays—*Amédée*, *The Killer*, *Exit The King*, and *Rhinoceros*—you dropped Béranger. Did you think you had said enough about him?

IONESCO

I changed his name because I thought people might get bored. I called him Jean, or The Character.

INTERVIEWER

In your new play, which is a kind of oneiric biography, he is called Jean again. In the opening scene, there are two coffins, Sartre's and Adamov's, and you are standing behind them. Why did you choose those two from among all the people you have known?

IONESCO

Adamov was a great friend of mine for years, until my plays really caught on; then he turned against me. I resented him for giving in to pressure and becoming "committed," Brechtian, and pro-Communist, although he never actually joined the party. We finally broke up over some silly literary dispute. I think I accused him of stealing my dreams! With Sartre it was different. It was a case of a missed appointment, *un rendez-vous manqué*, as one journalist put it. I had loved *La Nausée*, which had influenced my only novel, *Le Solitaire* (The hermit), but he annoyed me with his constant ideological changes. He was given solid proof of concentration camps in Russia, yet he did not publicize it because he feared it would disillusion the workers and strengthen the bourgeoisie. Towards the end, when the New Philosophers arrived on the scene, people like Foucault and Glucksman, he told them that he was no longer a Marxist. He always had to be aligned with *le dernier cri*, the latest ideological fashion. I would have preferred him to be more obdurate, even if in error. He was called "The Conscience of our Time;" I feel he was rather the *Un*conscience of our time—*L'inconscience*.

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But he was always nice and courteous to me, and my plays were the only ones he allowed to be put on a double-bill with his, so I am sad that I didn't get close to him. I had a dream about him recently: I am on a stage in front of a huge, empty auditorium, and I say, "That's it, nobody comes to see my plays any more." Then a little man walks on stage, and I recognize him as Sartre. He says, "Not true, look there, up in the gallery, it's full of young people." And I say to him, "Ah Monsieur Sartre, how I would like to talk to you, at last." And he replies, "Too late . . . too late." So you see, it was a missed appointment.

INTERVIEWER

This play, *Journey Among The Dead*, has been a great success with the public as well as with the critics. It's coming to the Comédie Française in the spring. With that out of the way, have you started work on something else?

IONESCO

It's a play about the life and martyrdom of a modern saint, who has just been canonized by the Church—or is it beatified? Which comes first? I'm not sure. Anyway, his name was Father Maximilian Kolbe, a Pole, and he died in Auschwitz. They were going to send some prisoners to a mine, where they would die of hunger and thirst. Father Kolbe offered to go instead of a man who had a wife and children and didn't want to die. That man is still alive.

INTERVIEWER

Does it matter to you if the Church canonizes him or not? And what about the recent allegations of anti-Semitism regarding him?

IONESCO

Oh dear! It won't matter to me at all whether the Church canonizes him or not. The important thing is that such a man existed. As for his anti-Semitism, I have not heard anything.

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People always try to find base motives behind every good action. We are afraid of pure goodness and of pure evil. I very much doubt that such a man could have been remotely anti-Semitic.

INTERVIEWER

For this play, you already had a clear idea of the character and the plot. Do you always start with an idea?

IONESCO

It depends. Some plays start with a plan. For example, *Macbett* was a conscious parody of Shakespeare. I already had the idea for *Rhinoceros*. But I had no idea at all where plays like *The Chairs*, *The Lesson*, and *The Bald Soprano* would lead. I had the idea of the corpse for *Amédee*, but the rest came bit by bit.

INTERVIEWER

How do you work?

IONESCO

I work in the morning. I sit comfortably in an armchair, opposite my secretary. Luckily, although she's intelligent, she knows nothing about literature and can't judge whether what I write is good or worthless. I speak slowly, as I'm talking to you, and she takes it down. I let characters and symbols emerge from me, as if I were dreaming. I always use what remains of my dreams of the night before. Dreams are reality at its most profound, and what you invent is truth because invention, by its nature, can't be a lie. Writers who try to prove something are unattractive to me, because there is nothing to prove and everything to imagine. So I let words and images emerge from within. If you do that, you might prove something in the process. As for dictating the text to my secretary, for twenty-five years I wrote by hand. But now it is impossible for me; my hands shake and I am too nervous. Indeed, I am so nervous that I kill my characters immediately. By dictating, I give them the chance to live and grow.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you correct what she has written afterward?

IONESCO

Hardly. But to get back to my new play, I tried to change the incoherent language of the previous plays into the language of dreams. I think it works, more or less.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a favorite among your plays?

IONESCO

Until recently it was *The Chairs*, because the old man remembers a scene from his childhood, but very vaguely, like the light of a dying candle, and he remembers a garden whose gate is closed. For me that is paradise—the lost paradise. This scene is far more important to me than the end, which is more spectacular.

INTERVIEWER

We have talked about the metaphysical and ritualistic aspects of your work, but there is a comic element as well, which has greatly contributed to your popularity.

IONESCO

Georges Duhamel used to say that "Humor is the courtesy of despair." Humor is therefore very important. At the same time, I can understand people who can't laugh any more. How can you, with the carnage that is going on in the world—in the Middle East, in Africa, in South America, everywhere? There is awfully little that is conducive to mirth.

INTERVIEWER

Whatever happens in the future, your place in the literary history of our time is secure. What is your own assessment of your work?

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IONESCO

I'll tell you about a dream I had recently. When I was a school boy in Bucharest, my father used to come into my room in the evening and check my homework. He would open my drawers and find nothing but bits of poetry, drawings, and papers. He would get very angry and say that I was a lazybones, a good-for-nothing. In my dream, he comes into my room and says, "I hear you have done things in the world, you have written books. Show me what you have done." And I open my drawers and find only singed papers, dust and ashes. He gets very angry and I try to appease him, saying, "You are right, Daddy, I've done nothing, nothing."

INTERVIEWER

Yet you go on writing.

IONESCO

Because I can't do anything else. I have always regretted having gotten involved with literature up to my neck. I would have preferred to have been a monk; but, as I said, I was torn between wanting fame and wishing to renounce the world. The basic problem is that if God exists, what is the point of literature? And if He *doesn't* exist, what is the point of literature? Either way, my writing, the only thing I have ever succeeded in doing, is invalidated.

INTERVIEWER

Can literature have any justification?

IONESCO

Oh yes, to entertain people. But that is not important. Yet, to introduce people to a different world, to encounter the miracle of being, that is important. When I write, "The train arrives at the station," it is banal, but at the same time sensational, because it is invented. Literature can also help people. Two of my translators, a Romanian and a German, were dying of cancer when they were translating *Exit the King*. They told me that they knew they were going to die, and the play

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helped them. Alas, it does not help me, since I am not reconciled to the idea of death, of man's mortality. So you see, I am contradicting myself a little by saying that literature can be significant. People who don't read are brutes. It is better to write than to make war, isn't it?

INTERVIEWER

So, perhaps writing has been a way of exorcising your basic anxiety about death? Or at least learning to live with it?

IONESCO

Perhaps. But my work has been essentially a dialogue with death, asking him, "Why? Why?" So only death can silence me. Only death can close my lips.

—**Shusha Guppy**

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Do You Know What It Means To Miss New Orleans?

Bobbie Ann Mason

In the airport limousine on the way into New Orleans, the driver says, "See that cemetery we're passing? In New Orleans, no one is buried underground—dig five feet and you hit water. New Orleans is below sea level. So people are buried in vaults, above ground."

In the dark, the shapes of the vaults stand out like rows of playhouses.

"Nobody has a basement either," says the driver.

"That would make my job a lot easier," says Sherry Williams, the lone passenger, vaguely. A city virtually on the ocean, yet below sea level, is a contradiction that hardly registers with her.

"How's that?"

"I'm an archaeologist. I dig up the past."

Sherry has not seen her old friend, Marlene Ballew, in ten years. Not since college. When Marlene wrote, suggesting the reunion in New Orleans, Sherry realized that it was finally time to see her again, and she felt guilty that she had waited so long. They had drifted apart after Marlene had been institutionalized for a series of nervous breakdowns. In the bleak hospital, Marlene cheerfully made paper flowers and painted

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watercolors of government intrigue—Watergate scenes. The last time Sherry saw her, Marlene recited poetry, screeching and cackling like all three witches in *Macbeth*, poems that no one would have thought Marlene knew, like "Kubla Khan" and "Leda and the Swan." When she forgot words, she supplied others without missing a beat. Sherry felt that Marlene was a lost person, no longer reachable. She left Kentucky, going away to graduate school in New York and returning to Kentucky only once, when her mother died.

In her letter, Marlene said she was cured. She was married, with a two-year-old child and a splendid home on Irvine Road in Lexington. She wrote, "I'm so calm now, you wouldn't believe it. Having kids changes you. It's something to do with hormones. I'm okay now. Really, I'm fine." Marlene's husband was going to New Orleans on business, and Marlene was going along. She invited Sherry to come. "I know it sounds ridiculous—you're too far away. But I keep thinking of how we always talked of going to Mardi Gras but never did. Mardi Gras is over, but maybe it's not too late to have a reunion."

Marlene comes at her like a gust of wind, her arms open wide. Her hair, which used to be long and straight, is cut short, with springy little curls. It is the wrong style for her baby-fine hair, but on Marlene it looks fashionably extreme, like something on a model in *Vogue*. When they embrace in the hotel room, Sherry feels Marlene's small, fragile frame, plump now, and breaks into tears. Marlene, ignoring the tears, cries out, "Tell all! Do you still put beer on your hair? Is *Get Smart* still your favorite show? I still think you look like Ninety-Nine. Tell me all about the males you've had affairs with. I want to know EVERYTHING."

Sherry has forgotten that Marlene always called men "males," an impersonal word, and it brings back memories: the way Marlene sometimes jerks herself into an uncharacteristically prim, upright posture when she catches herself slumping; her flamboyant behavior in public; the way she craves luxuries, like this hotel room. They are sharing the room. Ed, Marlene's husband, is attending a convention at a hotel in the French Quarter, but that hotel was filled and

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Marlene insisted on being with Sherry at the Hyatt. Marlene says, "I stayed with him last night, and I couldn't sleep for all the jazz bands."

They exchange news quickly. Only the highlights of the past ten years seem relevant, and they leave out most things, hurrying along to the present.

"Did you want to marry him?" Marlene, cross-legged on one of the beds and smoking a skinny brown cigarette, is referring to Sherry's recent lover.

"No. It was all wrong. He wanted to have children right away, but I didn't want to give up my career. Anybody who marries me will have to traipse around while I dig up old tools and pots." She laughs apologetically. "Imagine discussing that so rationally. People used to just get married without asking any questions like that."

"Tools and pots," says Marlene with a laugh. "Pools and tots."

Sherry is so thirsty after the martini on the plane that she is gulping a soft drink from the machine down the corridor. Then she says, "But I'm afraid I'm never going to find the right man. I'm too demanding."

This is a point she wants to make for Marlene's sake. She is aware that she wants Marlene to think she has in some way failed at something, because Sherry always seemed to be the successful one—her 3.8 average in college, her teaching career—while Marlene suffered one disappointment after another. She yawns, to shift the subject. "I'm trying to remember that guy we both went out with in the same week. Sam? Eddie? That guy who handed us both the exact same line?"

"His name was Bill Harrison."

"What did he say? Some trite image, like 'Your skin is like velvet,' or 'You have lips like roses.' What was it?"

Marlene says, "He said, 'Your eyes are deep, like resonant pools of amber.' Whatever those are."

"What garbage! How on earth did you remember that?"

Marlene shrugs. "Some things just stick to my brain."

The next morning at breakfast in the hotel courtyard, Marlene talks proudly about her daughter, Shannon. The

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night before, Marlene showed Sherry a picture of the child, a blonde toddler in a pinafore with the word *ME* on it.

"I should have brought you something for your baby," Sherry says apologetically. "A present."

"Having a baby was the hardest thing I ever did," says Marlene. "They say you don't remember the pain, but you can. What I can't remember is the pain of being crazy. I know I went through some awful times. I hurt people. I hurt myself. I almost killed myself once or twice—not deliberately, just out of craziness. Just being a show-off, really." She shudders. "I lost a whole chunk of my life."

"In your letter, you said you're fine," says Sherry carefully. "Are you? Are you really?"

Marlene nods, her coffee cup in her face. Her thin, penciled eyebrows are like the faint outlines of birds in a seascape. She says, "Before Shannon was born, I went through some depression, and afterward it was worse, so I knew I needed something. I'm taking Lithium. There are some side effects, but it keeps me under control."

"What side effects?"

"Oh, nothing serious. Except I gain weight like crazy!" She laughs, looking at her plate. "All these calories."

When she signals the waiter for more coffee, making a sharp click with her fingers, it hits Sherry that Marlene drinks coffee now. She is dressed in white, with lace on her blouse, and despite her added weight she looks light enough to blow away.

"I have to stay away from palm readers and psychics," Marlene says suddenly. "It's all the energy they radiate. I get worked up and then I flip out."

In New Orleans, the sight of palm trees is startling. In upstate New York, there was still snow on the ground. Sherry strolls with Marlene through the French Quarter. On Bourbon Street, Marlene gleefully points out odd items in stores—coffee cups made in the shape of breasts, purple pasties with long tassels, T-shirts with shockingly obscene messages. Marlene plays with the idea of getting a T-shirt for Ed. Her laughter flies down the street. On lace-work balconies, women

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are drying their hair and men are drinking whiskey from bottles in brown bags. Sherry and Marlene stop for chicory coffee and beignets at a café on Jackson Square. A small Dixieland group is performing in the street.

"I'm glad we finally got together here, even if it isn't Mardi Gras," Marlene says, smiling. The sun lights up her hair and makes it look like the light coming through a tree in the spring, when the leaves are just emerging.

"I'm glad, too."

"Don't you go back to Kentucky anymore?"

"Not since Mother died. I didn't want to see my father. There are too many hard feelings. I didn't even want to see Kentucky again." Sherry brushes a crumb off the table. "I never think about it."

"You've lost your accent."

"I have a confession to make. All those years, I was afraid to get in touch with you again because I felt guilty. I have plenty of reasons to be bitter about my father, but none for losing touch with you." Sherry sips her coffee. "I should have been a better friend."

"You had your work to think of. That's your strength," Marlene says warmly. "You were always so brilliant. I read an article of yours in a journal and it made me so proud. I recognized you in it! It reminded me of that paper you wrote for me once for history." Marlene breaks off into laughter.

At Marlene's urging, Sherry tells about her current work. In the small upstate town where she lives now, she has discovered evidence that a substantial Indian culture was there four hundred years before. The culture has not been documented. It was always said there weren't any Indians there—that the Indians used that land for their hunting grounds and their settlements were farther south, nearer the river.

"But I've been around talking to the farmers and I've seen some things they've found in their fields. Arrowheads and pottery fragments and utensils. You wouldn't believe all the stuff they've collected. Bushel baskets full. And they never said anything. But they've known all along there were Indians there."

"The farmers would know," Marlene says, nodding.

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She snaps her fingers for a refill of coffee, and the waiter fills both cups. Marlene puts sugar in her coffee, saying, "I shouldn't eat all this sugar." She folds the empty sugar packet in half, then folds it over again and creases it. "Did you see how rude that waiter was? He won't get a tip from me."

On the street, a white-faced harlequin is creeping up behind people, tapping on their shoulders and pantomiming a conversation. People are laughing. Marlene says, "That's how I feel sometimes, sneaking up on strangers, trying to make them listen, but no words come out."

The musicians are playing "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans?" Sherry sings along, but she cannot remember the words beyond the title. The bizarre clutter of the street scene has strange echoes of the past, as though the whole psychedelic era had found its place and come to rest in New Orleans.

Idly, Sherry says, "Have you noticed that in all the songs about this city, they pronounce it New Or-LEENS, to make it rhyme? Nothing rhymes with New OR-le-ans. 'Way Down Yonder in New Or-LEENS' is another one."

"However you pronounce it, I could really learn to love this city," Marlene says, her voice rising clear and joyful above the music.

"I'm surprised to realize how familiar New Orleans is, through its music. I've always heard about Bourbon Street. Rampart Street. Papa Joe's." Sherry is groping for this familiarity. There is nothing really familiar about New Orleans, a place where people are buried above ground. The stuffed Aunt Jemimas propped in the doorways of shops are depressing. Sherry feels as remote from the black cultural heritage of this city as she feels from her old friend Marlene.

Marlene's husband Ed is tall and heavy-set, with capped front teeth that have the artificial look of guitar picks. Sherry is drinking Hurricanes with Marlene and Ed at a revolving rooftop restaurant. Marlene has a flirtatious way with her husband, as though she doesn't take him seriously. She gives him looks of disbelief, teasing him, drawing him out. Ed has an

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old-fashioned manner of hovering over Marlene and Sherry, the way older men might have done when they were college girls, ten years ago. In some men, these quaint manners might still be charming, forgivable, but Sherry has the feeling that Ed is forcing them, extending his protectiveness of an unstable wife to her friend.

The restaurant revolves slowly, so that they can see the whole city spread out around them—the bright, green-lighted dome of a tall building, some glass towers, the distant lights fading into the horizon of darkness, and in the foreground, the Louisiana Superdome, like a mushroom growing in the dark. Its lights are out. They are on a turntable, rotating slowly, but the effect is deceptive. Sherry feels they are sitting still, and the wall with the scenes is moving.

Ed is a sales representative for an air-conditioning firm. He is still wearing his name tag from the convention he is attending. He explains to Sherry the advantages of one air-cooling system over another. When the Superdome rolls by, he describes its complex cooling system. Marlene looks at him blankly.

"Talk about a contract," Ed says, returning her gaze. "If I'd had that contract, we'd be on easy street today."

Marlene says, "Sherry, tell Ed about your Indian discoveries. Oh, Ed, this is so exciting."

"Oh, nothing's really materialized yet." Embarrassed, Sherry explains her project briefly. "Nobody thought the Iroquois Indians lived there, but I think I can document it and I hope to make a lot of new discoveries about their culture."

"That's great," says Ed. "I always thought the Indians got a bad break. They need somebody to take an interest."

Marlene sometimes looks at her husband the way Nancy Reagan looked at Ronald Reagan during the campaign, but then the look fades and she seems sad. Sherry wonders about mixing Hurricanes and lithium. A Hurricane has three shots of rum in it.

When Marlene is in the restroom, Ed leans over to Sherry and says confidentially, "That little baby has meant a world of difference to Marlene. She worships her."

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"She needed someone to care for." Sherry had been the one to take care of Marlene. Now Ed is taking care of her. "We drifted apart," she says distractedly. "Marlene was my best friend, but I couldn't handle it."

Ed shakes his head. "It hasn't been easy, let me tell you. But she's all right. Having that baby was the best thing that ever happened to her."

By the time Marlene returns, Sherry's head is whirling. The absurdity of sitting with Ed and Marlene on this lazy Susan in the sky hits her. They could be gods on Olympus, feasting. She half-expects Marlene to recite "Kubla Khan." When she sits down, the flames from the candles light up Marlene's face, and in this lighting Sherry sees the lines around her friend's eyes.

In the hotel elevator, Marlene presses her forehead against the glass back and looks down on the center courtyard, framed by twenty-seven stories of balconies. The sound of Dixieland jazz floats up. They walk along the corridor of the twentieth floor, hugging the wall, away from the low edge of the balcony. In the room, the maid has turned their bedcovers down and left weather reports and gold-wrapped chocolates on their pillows. The tooth fairy was here. Sherry waits for Marlene to talk about Ed, but Marlene sprawls wearily on the bed, the chocolates spilling from her hand.

"It's my turn to confess," she says, sitting up. "I knew I'd have to be drunk to do it."

"What is it, Marlene?"

Marlene's eyes are closed, and her eyeshadow has settled on the creases of her eyelids, making sharp blue lines. Marlene sits up and fusses with the paper on a chocolate. "Do you remember when those guys in the art department said we were lesbians?"

"Vaguely. I remember you said somebody thought that."

"It wasn't just one opinion—it was dozens of people. That whole art department believed it."

"I just remember hearing a rumor. I didn't think anything of it."

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"I shouldn't eat all this sugar," Marlene says, biting on the chocolate. "At first what they said made me angry, but then I believed it was true. I realized they were saying something obvious."

"You never said much about it."

"I didn't know how to tell you. But it really affected me," Marlene says. "I don't even know how to tell you now."

"What did you feel?"

"I always loved you. Didn't you know that?"

"I loved you too, Marlene, and I always cared about you. What was wrong with that?"

"I always admired you—and when that came up, I got to thinking about what it meant." Marlene pauses. "I thought it was right that you went away. I didn't try to find you. I thought you made the right decision then. You were so smart and you were going to make something out of yourself. You didn't need me, hanging along, depending on you. I would have ruined your career."

"That's stupid, Marlene!" Sherry staggers to the bathroom. She draws some water and takes a drink, then brushes her teeth up and down with ferocity. She's sad that Marlene harbored these feelings, angry at what they have done to her.

"You imagined all that, Marlene," she says, returning. "There was nothing to it. What did your analysts make of it?"

Marlene shrugs. "They can analyze me till they're blue in the face, but it makes no difference. I'm a manic-depressive, and that's all chemical. So they don't even try to understand me. They just write the prescriptions." She punches the pillow and places it behind her head, against the headboard. "Aren't they saying homosexuality is genetic nowadays? That's chemistry, isn't it? You should know. You're a scientist."

Sherry begins undressing. She is very tired, and the Hurricane is still whirling. She wishes she could find the eye of the hurricane, a place to rest. She says, "Even if it were true, it's not the disgrace now that it was then."

In the middle of the night, Sherry hears Marlene throwing up in the bathroom. Half awake and confused, Sherry recalls Marlene's hysteria once when she took her to the hospital,

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Marlene claiming loudly that a CIA agent had given her LSD as an experiment. She said she wasn't insane. It was only an acid flashback, she said. By that time Sherry had learned to recognize the signs—the dislocation, the breathlessness, the endless talk.

The light from the bathroom makes a triangle on the wall. In the corridor, someone's door slams.

Marlene, seeing Sherry awake, says, "I think I've got food poisoning."

"Should I call Ed?"

"No. Please don't." Marlene tries to light a cigarette, then clutches her stomach. "It was that gumbo yesterday at lunch. It had oysters in it."

Marlene disappears into the bathroom again. Sherry feels cold. She reaches for her robe. It occurs to her that vomiting is like flipping out. Both are involuntary expressions, inner explosions. She feels a wave of panic.

"It'll pass," says Marlene, returning to bed. "I've had it before, from fish sticks in Denver. Never order fish that far inland! You're okay, aren't you? You didn't have the gumbo."

In the morning, Sherry brings Marlene orange juice and toast from the courtyard. Marlene drinks the orange juice but cannot eat the toast.

"I won't die," she says, trying to smile. "It will do me good to go on a diet."

"You need fluids," says Sherry.

"This is silly. Let me tell you what I want you to do. I want you to go out sightseeing. No sense wasting your trip."

"I don't want to leave you here like this."

"Take that trolley car out through the city. They say it's a lovely ride. You can see the real New Orleans."

"I'm not really that much of a tourist. I should stay here with you."

"You've got to go. You came all the way from New York. You can't miss this opportunity. I want you to go and tell me what it's like."

"Don't you want me to call Ed?"

"No. I'll be okay. I just have to get this out of my system."

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"Are you sure?"

Marlene sits up on the edge of the bed and reaches for her purse. "I'm ordering you to leave me here," she says sternly. "You don't have to take care of me."

On the St. Charles trolley, which curves across the city, Sherry sits across from two young couples with knapsacks. One of the two girls has a tiny baby in a yellow playsuit. The boy next to her is reading aloud from the guidebook, while jiggling the baby by the hand, in rhythm with the trolley. Actually, Sherry is glad to be alone for a while. Marlene's confession re-colors Sherry's memories, something like reevaluating shards of pottery in the light of a new theory. Bits and pieces, fraught with new meaning, float forth: scenes of Marlene's worshipful regard, the way Marlene liked the same artists Sherry did, even the way she had bothered to find an article of hers in some obscure journal.

A tourist information clerk told Sherry to get off six blocks past Napoleon Street at the Garden District, where there were quaint shops in old Victorian houses. But there is some mistake. There are no shops, although there are plenty of old houses. Undecided where to get off, Sherry rides past Loyola and Tulane, side by side across from a park. An avenue of palm trees, lined up as perfectly as tenpins, stands perpendicular to St. Charles. The trolley lurches gently along, and Sherry, tense, resists its motion. The mansions begin to change to small frame houses. The people on the seats facing hers are consulting their guidebook and talking with the driver. They look alarmed. When they suddenly decide to get off, Sherry follows them.

"Do you know where we are?" Sherry asks the girl with the baby. She seems too young to have a child.

Smiling widely, the girl says, "We were going to make the complete circuit, but the driver says you can't; you have to get off and get back on again."

"I'm with you then," Sherry says. "I don't want to get stranded at the end of the line."

She waits for the return trolley with the group on a grassy

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median. They are from Ohio, and it's their spring break. The baby's mother sets the baby on the grass and changes its diaper. When his mother says, "He's been so good on this trip," Sherry tries to imagine what her student days would have been like if she, or Marlene, had had a baby. Students nowadays seemed so normal, so much less desperate, than when she and Marlene were students. For a moment, she wonders if Marlene's craziness was just the craziness of their generation.

One of the boys crosses the street to a gas station and brings back Cokes.

"Please take this one," he says to Sherry, handing her a can. "I can share one with my wife."

Sherry accepts the drink gratefully. The sun is high and she feels sweat stains under her arms.

"Hey! Have you been to Brennan's?" the boy asks. "We went to Brennan's for breakfast. It was incredible. We had about five courses."

His wife, the baby's mother, says, "We had champagne, and dessert. And omelets."

"I had crepes," says the other girl, who is sitting cross-legged in the grass, looking in the mirror of a compact. She is having trouble with her contact lens.

A trolley comes by, but they are in no hurry. The girl is still fussing over her contact lens, and the boy with blond curls is busy repacking his knapsack. The baby's father is holding the baby and singing it a song about panda bears. Sherry stays with the little group, drinking her Coke while the sun beats down on her head.

In the evening, Marlene is still shaky, but she feels well enough to go to the French Quarter with Sherry. Ed is attending his convention banquet. Sherry eats shrimp Creole, but Marlene sips tea. They talk about young people today, based on Sherry's report of the kids on the trolley. There is something loving and nostalgic about the way Marlene talks about old times, even about her breakdowns. "I was cuckoo!" she says. "But I didn't care. I thought I knew everything behind the whole Watergate conspiracy, and I would have

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testified if they had only sent me a subpoena." She laughs. "I thought the salvation of the whole country was up to me and Martha Mitchell."

After ordering coffee, Sherry says, "I've been thinking about last night. I don't know what to say, Marlene. We've gone our separate ways. How can I make it up to you?"

"Don't think about it," Marlene says.

In the dark, they cross Jackson Square Park and go up the steps to the river. They stroll up the wooden walk, past couples on benches, to see the steamer *Natchez*, which has a bright red paddle wheel. They stand there and gaze at the lights of a gift shop on the upper deck. A tour bus drives up then to the waterfront and turns around. Marlene and Sherry return to the wooden walk.

"Are you happy with Ed?" Sherry asks suddenly, in the wrong tone, one of disapproval. "I had to ask."

Marlene laughs. She is having trouble with her spike heels on the boardwalk. "Oh, sure. He's not my ideal, but he's good to me. I wish you could get to know him."

Marlene turns to face the river. A helicopter is flying low, its sound coming closer, with a searchlight playing down over the water.

"They're looking for something," Marlene says.

The helicopter passes, its searchlight sweeping the water like paint from a spray-can.

"I have to confess one more thing, Marlene. I was always afraid to see you again, because I was afraid if I got around you, you'd flip out again. I thought I was a bad influence because I always took charge, and I was afraid of what you might do when you were out of control. I was afraid you'd do something . . . violent."

"Oh, stop it!" Marlene cries. "Your guilt is making me sick. You keep seeing me as I was then, as if you were the one who had grown up and I was still a child. Don't you think I've changed too?" Marlene's voice carries across the water. "I don't blame you." More quietly, she says, "I can forgive us both for the way we were then."

"I'm sorry." Sherry doesn't know what to say.

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Marlene says, "Something's lost. Maybe a boat."

Upriver, beyond the bridge, the helicopter turns around and returns, its searchlight playing closer to the bank near them. On the water are occasional dark spots. Marlene and Sherry watch while the searchlight rides the water downstream. In the distance, at the bend, toward the Gulf, they see another searchlight.

"Somebody's boat must have overturned," says Marlene.

The wind is coming off the river. The helicopter is winking downstream, turning around, returning. A man and woman behind Sherry and Marlene are having an intense conversation, something about a promise to get some concert tickets. Marlene is insisting a boat is lost, but Sherry feels it is obvious that a person must have jumped off the bridge.

"Look, Marlene," Sherry says suddenly, as she sees the moon rising above a cloud. "Look how the moon is turned on its side down here. The waning moon looks lopsided. It's fading from the top instead of the side. In the North, it fades from the side, but it looks distorted down here because we're closer to the equator. We're seeing the moon from a different angle down here." She pauses, wondering. "Or is it this way in Kentucky too?"

Marlene looks skeptically at the moon. "I don't know. I never really thought about it." Her voice is flat, like the squashed moon.

"I wish I could remember," Sherry says, blinking back tears. "I can't remember how the moon looked in Kentucky."

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Portfolio

Tourism

Laurie Simmons

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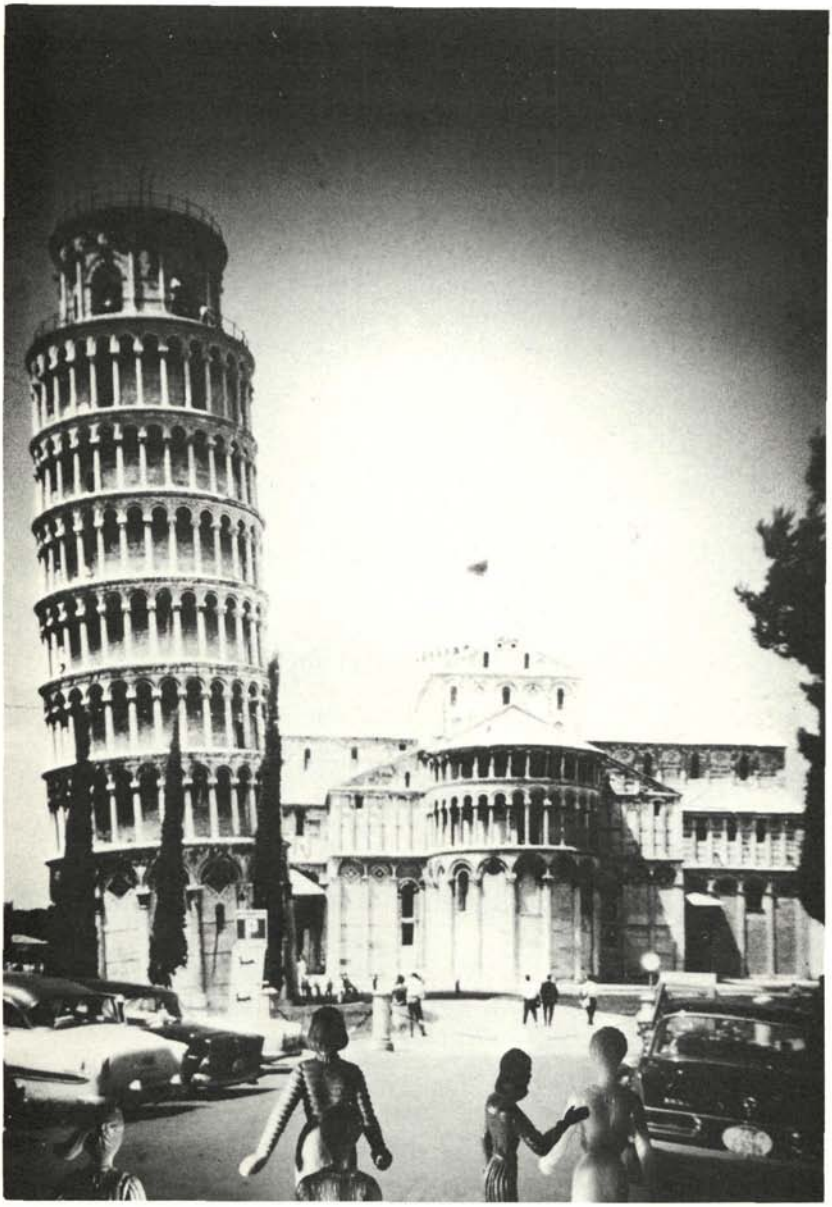

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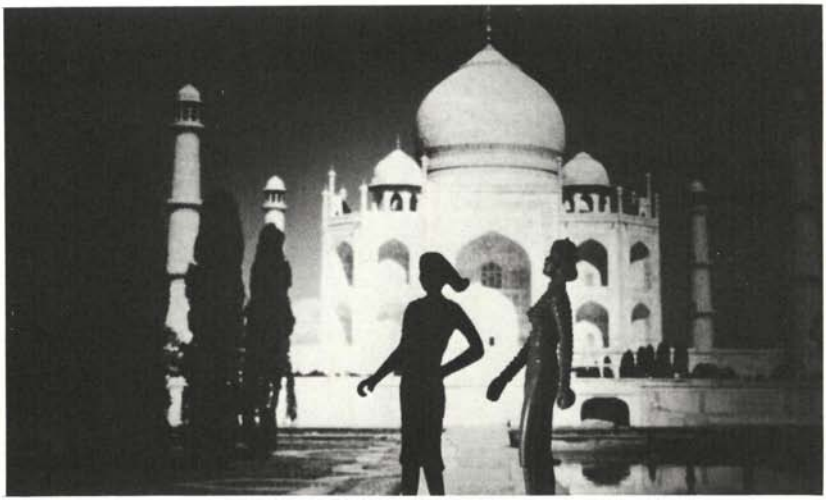

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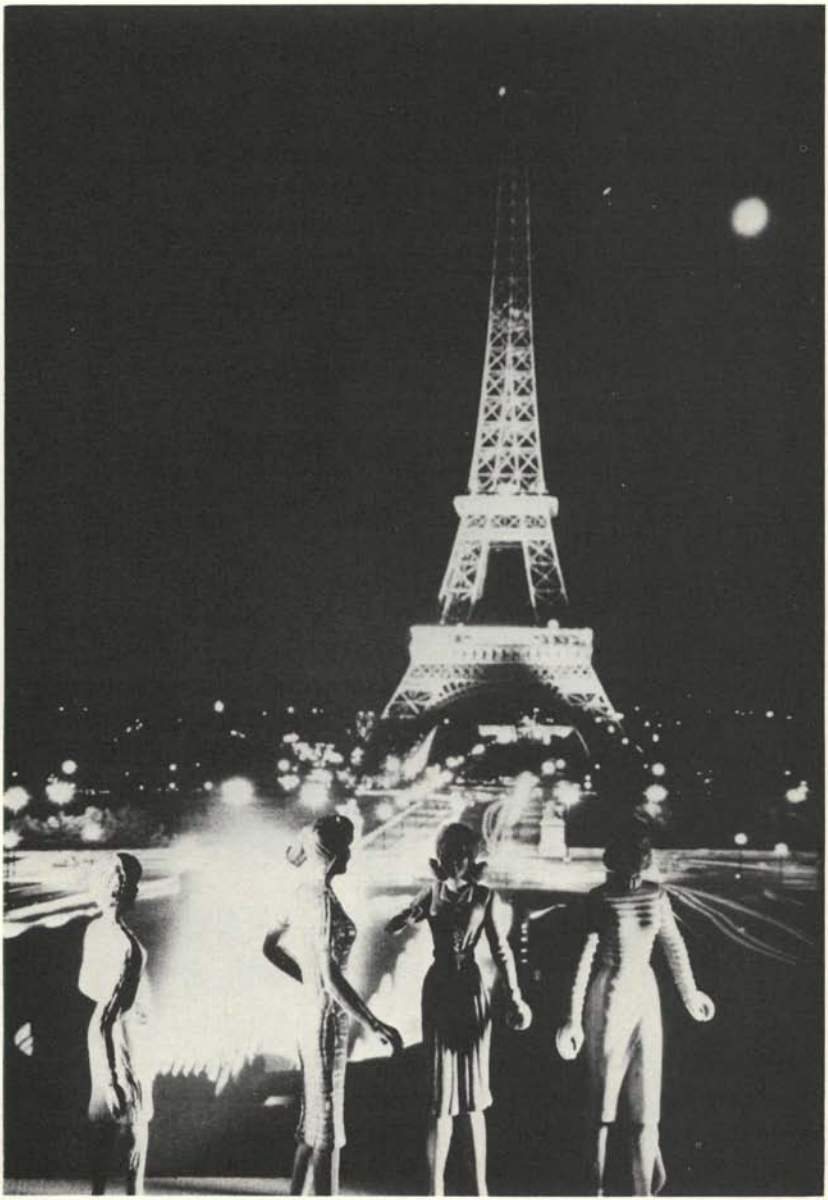

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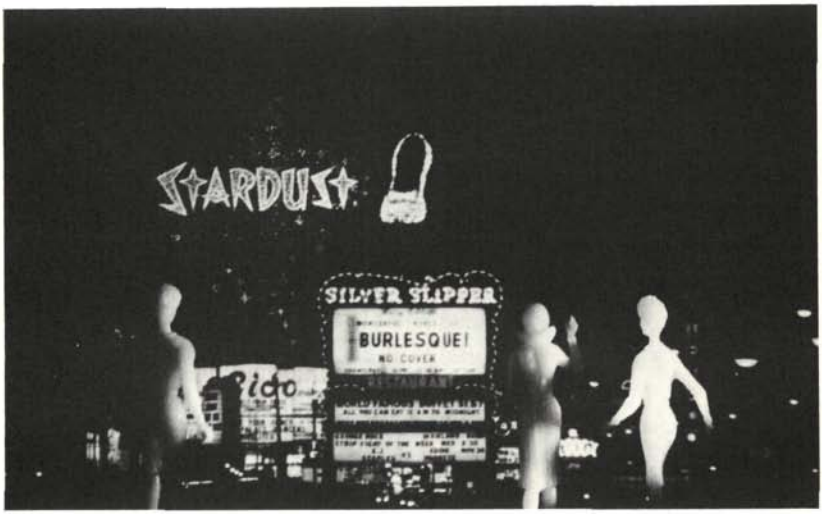

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A Poem by Joseph Brodsky

Translator's Note

I first met Joseph Brodsky in March, 1980. A month or two later he asked me to take a look at Gorbunov and Gorchakov, *his magnum opus from the mid-sixties, with an eye toward rendering it into the equivalent English verse forms. I spent a week at it, then concluded that, as I told him, I doubted I had the skill or nerves to do the job. Auden, after all, fearing he should come a cropper, balked at the comparatively leisurely affair of ottava rima. What might he have said, I wondered, of translating a work of 1400 lines, 1200 of which are made up of ten-line stanzas with two sets of quintuple rhymes (ABABABABAB), all in drumming pentameters, all dialogue? I begged off. Two years later Brodsky asked me to reconsider. Below, the reader has the result.*

Very briefly, by way of Argument: The poem is set in a "psychiatric hospital" on the outskirts of Leningrad. Gorbunov (from the word "gorbun": hunchback) and Gorchakov (from "gor'kii": bitter) are inmates, who, between the departure of Aquarius and the ascendancy of Pisces, talk, mostly at night, about the nature of the universe: mushrooms, the mind's mesh of dream-life and consciousness, speech, food, Marx, loneliness and the extent to which love relieves it, death, etc. So far as one can tell, Gorbunov, a provincial, has been "hospitalized" because his basic posture is non-Party. The doctors observe him, interrogate him, prepare a report. Gorchakov, a Leningrader, is their stoolie. His reward is the promise of freedom at Easter, when Gorbunov's fate is to be decided. In general, the poem's plot and themes are those of the Passion.

A word of warning: it is not always easy to tell who is talking. This is deliberate.

—Harry Thomas

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Gorbunov and Gorchakov

Canto 1

Gorbunov and Gorchakov

"Well, what'd you dream of this time, Gorbunov?"
"Oh, mushrooms, mostly." "Mushrooms! What the hell!
Again?" "Again." "You really make me laugh."
"And why is that? It isn't laughable.
According to the doctor, Gorchakov,
sleep is the stuff that keeps us normal." "Well,
I simply meant your dream's not new enough.
That's all." "What if no other dream will dwell
inside my head?" "We Leningraders have
a thousand dreams. You've got the chanterelle."

"Well, Gorchakov, what is it that instead
of mushrooms Leningraders dream of, then?"
"Well, it depends . . . Of concerts, forested
with bows. Grand streets and alleys. Simply men,
their faces. (Often dreams seem fragmented.)
The Neva, bridges. Even now and then
a page, which I can read without the aid
of specs! (The nurse takes them away at ten.)"
"Such dreams would strain the pupils in my head!"
"So what? I often dream about this pen."

"Who needs real life? Just look—now it's a dream.
Indeed, the day's not necessary. The dawn
light bleaches dreams like that. And how you scream
with rage at everyone when you're awakened . . .
Mickiewicz! Stop that screaming! For that dream
I gladly would have slept through supper, gone
without it." "Well, I dream of birds. I dream

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of a boy jumping over puddles. And
it's me . . ." "Well, Gorchakov? Don't stop midstream . . .
What's wrong?" "I feel a fever coming on.

Why do you care about all this?" "Beats me."
"Well, anyway, I dream of childhood, say
an attic where friends crawl around with me.
And of old age. There is no hideaway
from that . . . Oh, what a mess life seems to be:
old man, small boy . . ." "A dreary couple, eh?"
"Oh, Gorbunov, that's sheer stupidity!
These dreams are, after all, merely a way
of spending nights more interestingly.
By night we sift the heritage of day."

"That's a strange thing! What you call 'heritage.'
There is one question, though, you can't ignore:
What of old age? You show no signs of age.
When did you ever have gray hairs?" "Or snore
like Babanov beside the window? Or,
à la Mickiewicz, thrive on verbiage
and bustling? What's imagination for,
if not to use it pump-like to discharge
old age into the realm of sleep? What for?"

"But in that case, you know, it isn't you
that you'll be dreaming of?" "The Crosses was
constructed for stoneheaded fools like you.
And there they'll keep you living under glass!
So tell me who I'm dreaming of . . . Yoohoo!"
"Gor-kiewicz . . . maybe Gor-banov." "You ass!
You're crazy, Gorbunov." "The head is new:
your face, their hair. Delusions sicken us
enough when we're awake without this too."
"They'll sew the pockets up on your pajamas."

"I've got pajamas without underwear
on, as it is." "At times I see a ring

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of burning logs, stoves . . ." "That's a real one there!
Streets, conversations. Simply things. The string
section and solo playing as a pair.
And women. And, perhaps, a spicy fling."
"Just yesterday I dreamed of silverware
for six." "And do they forecast anything—
your dreams—or whirl like chaos everywhere?"
"Some are prophetic, some just menacing."

"Freud says that we are prisoners of our dreams."
"I've always heard that we are slaves to habit.
You're slipping, Gorbunov, or so it seems."
"No, I can see the page on which I read it."
"Freud was a liar." "Liars come in reams . . .
Now let's suppose you want a tasty bit . . ."
"You mean that thing in pants?" "And out of them.
And say you dream of titmice pecking at
your face. No gossip's franker than a dream."
"That brings us to your mushrooms, doesn't it?"

"They're just like islands. (Mushrooms even sprout,
you know, like little islands.) The same grand
streets, dead ends, words. The truth is that throughout
our lives we speak in spurts, or tend to. And
between the spurts, like silence, all about,
there's grass. But you can touch them with your hand.
That's why they have unbounded rights, no doubt.
And why the solid ground on which I stand
seems as unsteady as those corks borne out
in lines upon the Neva, far from land."

"Then you're just like those fishermen who face
the water hour on hour as their floats go
riding the surface, sitting in one place?
Is that correct?" "Well, yes, correct, although . . ."
"And, after supper, fashioning new shapes
of lures, lighthearted, watching the dusk glow."
"And hiding in my pockets my lure case."

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"They'll keep you locked up here forever!" "Oh,
why are you aggravating me?" "Because
my name is Gorchakov, as you well know."

Canto 2

Gorbunov and Gorchakov

"Had supper?" "Yeah, some vegetables, a dish
of jello . . ." "Oh, the cook's gone on a spree!
Well, what's outside?" "Just starry fields." "What's this?
Another Galileo, doubtlessly!"
"With the departure of Aquarius
about the twentieth of February,
we see the coming in of Pisces, the Fish
sign pledging rivers will again run free."
"And what about the earth?" "The earth?" "Well, yes.
What's down below?" "That tree-lined lane you see."

"You know what, Gorbunov, you're really mad.
Your aim's, I'm sure, to be another Newton.
There's this guy Khomutov, who says amid
the lock-up's racket, vomitings, and moans:
'My name is Hamilton, and I'm not mad.'
And yet he snores just like our Kharitons."
"To build the port at Petersburg we had
to bring into the country lots of Teutons.
Their names were harder than the work they did.
Perhaps the Khomutovs are Hamiltons."

"The heater's on, but I still feel a chill."
"Don't lean against the window then." "Why not?
You think your shimmering pets up there will . . .?"
"Are you convinced?" "Oh no, I'm full of doubt,
since snowdrifts and that tree-lined lane are still
all I can see." "Aquarius is out
bending about the Dipper." "It'd be swell
to have a telescope. You wouldn't shout

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so much." "A telescope! In here? Like hell!"
"What are you getting so worked up about?"

"You've put your filthy feet up on my mattress.
You could at least have taken off those old
slippers." "I'm cold. You know, the interest
I've shown in your damp chanterelles has told
on me. I feel chilled to the bone unless
I'm wearing slippers. So you shouldn't scold."
"I doubt Freud ever dreamed of such progress.
And progress is a thing we should uphold.
The activist imagines a rain forest;
the passivist comes down with a bad cold."

"Your mushrooms are the enemies of men-
tal health. They're far from harmless, Gorbunov.
How much importance do you give to them?"
"As much as I give love." "And what is love?"
"An end to loneliness." "The very end."
"It's being able once to stand above
the bed and, just by bending over in
the silence, with your hands, brow, breath, touch life."
"What are you staring at? The stars? The lane?"
"The opposite of empty narrative."

"Toss me an apple." "Catch." "Just tell me this:
What are your mushrooms, if you know at all?"
"Whenever I see chanterelles, in grass
or forests, for some reason I recall
being in love. It's in the blood perhaps.
For always like an echo, dim but real,
I feel it." "That's just habit and, alas,
the mind's instinct to make things general."
"The hands do that. Upstairs what's striking is
the total absence of the habitual."

"So in the darkness of your sleep you dream
of chanterelles?" "Yes, constantly." "And so

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you dream of love?" "It's all the same . . . You seem
to think that's strange." "Not strange, but sinful though.
Yes, sinful, and to tell the truth I deem
the whole thing utterly disgraceful." "No!"
"What are you smirking at?" "You are a scream."
"Hand me an apple, won't you." "Sure, although
the hand you need is with this mushrooms theme."
"That *s* makes it polygamy, you know.

There now! I planted that one on your chin.
The bitterness I feel is manifest
in my reproach." "You say it is a sin,
but sin is something punished in the flesh,
and how can Gorbunov be punished when
life's agonies lie focused in his breast
as in a prism? When there's freedom in
the future?" "Apparently I am a guest
at someone's wake." "Apparently my grin
makes me, today at least, an optimist."

"And the Last Judgment?" "That's just memory.
Like flashbacks in a film. Why magnify
Apocalypse? What's it to us? It's merely
five months in some wasteland. Merely five.
Well, I've blown half my life and I would be
content to sleep with mushrooms from now on. I
remember, though, that one day I must flee
before the Fiery Angel of the Sky . . ."
"Pain crushes pride." "No, not a bit. The tree
of pride thrives on our daily misery."

"You're saying you don't fear the dark?" "It has
its landmarks, and with some of them I am
acquainted rather well." "You swear it does?"
"Plenty of them. Just whistle and they'll come."

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"Vanity's mother is resourcefulness."
"I doubt the wisdom of that aphorism.
A man's soul never feels the loss of space."
"About dead creatures would you say the same?"
"I think one's soul, while in this place,
takes on the features of its frame."

Canto 3

Gorbunov in the Night

"Night. Hospital. Hostility all round . . .
This hardly makes a tragedy . . . Besides,
when my soul hears the sentences resound
on Judgment Day, it will be less afraid
the harder things were for it on this ground.
When I'm in pain I always think I could
bear it with ease the second time around.
Thus in the man one seeks the boy that died . . .
Those mushrooms brought me here. But all that's bound
up with them in my mind remains outside.

I dream of chanterelles, but I don't dream
now of my wife. Which may be only right.
Cloth tears where it's most frayed . . . I see there's some
truth in . . . I got her pregnant . . . Just the bright
idea I had for keeping her . . . A bum
does things like that . . . Apparently I've hit
bottom . . . Whether my soul's okay I am
uncertain, but my eardrums are all right.
I hear the strains of Babanov's steel comb
and down the hall the rustle of a sheet . . .

And I hear someone's voice amid the silence.
But this does not resemble auditory
hallucination: the ear has its defence

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against the pressures of the deepest sea.
Besides, I'm contradicted by that voice—
surely, consistently, and hollowly.
Whose voice is it? Can't be my wife's. And since
the spirit kingdom keeps persistently
as silent as my wife, it can't be saints.
I wish I had my muffler here with me!

Night. Hospital. The tree-lined lane. Snowdrifts.
Contending with the universe, an alder
hums. Changed into a kike, the male nurse lifts
a Jewish periscope around the corner.
My bed shrinks like a coffin till it fits.
My pupils, shrinking, fight to open wider.
And my blood bubbles like bicarbonates.
And as they're bared my freezing ankles shiver.
And like a breeding microbe my mind splits
and in the silence multiplies forever.

Oh, there were two of us that morning . . . Two
up at the altar. Then she left. Cut, scarred,
I'm always talking to someone . . . Yes, two
were there. And two remained! Month follows hard
on month: now February bids adieu
to January. That's how, like a guard,
the altar proves to be a hindrance (due
to the progression of the calendar)
to silence which, by setting up a new
force field within myself, I disregard.

She left. I am possessed by, I possess
myself. Myself? Well, maybe I should call
for Gorchakov? . . . Hey, Gorchakov! . . . I guess
the bed bell's rung . . . But is it, after all,
so senseless for one pair of vying lips,
especially in the absence of a hall,
to sing as two? I watch them as they press
together, syllable by syllable.

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I am—a circle cleaved. Thus, more or less,
we're magnets, horseshoe-shaped, identical.

Night. Night. My lips performing a duet.
You think that that dishonors me? I say
that there's a special coziness in it.
It is a contradiction, yes, but they
are close—almost a family when quiet.
And all the more so in a brief display.
The upper lip's a refuge for your *pet*,
the lower, well, that's for the fiancée.
Though that which splits in two will surely split
into two hundred just as easily.

And everything that has increased twofold
is graspable, no longer vacuous.
In bifurcation, therefore, we behold
the end of loneliness, that incubus.
And, therefore, though despair has split my soul
in two like some old board, it's obvious
that what survives the splitting is two-souled.
And if to have two souls is blasphemous,
then why suppose that wood, when you're stone-cold,
needs fire to burn. Fire is superfluous.

Oh God in Heaven, if you're so designed
that you can listen to two voices blast
at one time from one set of lips, and find
in them not noise but strife between the past
and future, raise to Yourself my coughing mind,
planting its microbes where Your light is cast,
and with an omnipotent gesture grind
to dust the days and thoughts that I've amassed.
As for what's left, may it be left behind:
silence and suffocation licked at last.

But if I really need a listener, send,
without delay, oh Lord, a citizen

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of Heaven down to me. I won't pretend
to be superior to him in sin
or sarcasm. He wouldn't comprehend
them anyway. But if that's out, well, then
let cherubs and not Gorchakov ascend
above the filthy shelter I'm kept in,
and with Your blessing circle to the end
above the sobbing and the spying men."

Canto 4

Gorchakov and the Doctors

"Well, Gorchakov, make your report." "You mean
on Gorbunov?" "Of course, on Gorbunov."
"His mental operation is, when seen
in toto, dialectical, but half
of all his statements clearly contravene
the Party's views, and several, as to both
events and things, are new for us." "A sign
of a deficiency of nitrogen
resulting in disintegration of
the mechanism of self-control." "His chin

is fatty, slightly asymmetrical.
Has close-knit eyebrows. And his nose is mapped
with intersecting, broken corpuscles."
"Bad kidneys, doubtlessly." "His forehead, wrapped
in compresses and asymmetrical
too, is a mass of veins all sticking up.
His weakness and his god's the chanterelle.
With women, you might say, he's handicapped.
'The inner world is made majestical;
the outer, correspondingly, gets scrapped,'

is fairly typical of this guy's line.
From regular pronouncements more or less
like this one, one can easily divine

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all his wrongheaded-, well, his non-Partyness."
"A leftward shift. He's out to undermine
the principles of Marxism." "There is
too little evidence." "Well, does he whine
at atmospheric changes?" "Does he miss
the fairer sex?" "In fairness, no, he's fine.
His body language is the antithesis,

in fact, of a . . . uh, what's it called? . . . Oh, shit! . . ."
"Come off it, Gorchakov." ". . . a ladies man."
"How is he down below? . . . You know, his private,
well, parts and . . ." "Strictly business: to the can
and back again three times a day. That's it.
Excuse the crudeness." "Not at all. Go on.
And have some water." "Water?" "Oh, a bit
of cognac maybe?" "No, I'm not a fan.
I never touch the stuff." "You hypocrite!
Why was it that you licked your lips just then?"

"I, I'm not sure . . . Something to do with water."
"Precisely what?" "I can't remember what.
I'm sorry." "Wasn't it a glass at supper?"
"No, no . . . you've tied my mind up in a knot . . .
But wait! I see . . . a man . . . and sands like Tartar
hordes whirling all around . . . He hasn't got
a drop of water . . . and it's getting hotter . . .
The sun is at . . . what do you call it? . . . at
the zenith. The environment's sheer murder . . .
And suddenly . . . a well . . ." "Don't drag it out.

Go on." "And, well, then everything is empty
and dead again. The well, well, vanished . . ." "Hey,
hey, Gorchakov, what's wrong?" "I . . . uh . . . I'm sorry,
I, well, I guess I lost my head . . . Today
he showed himself in all the majesty
of his idealistic disarray."
"Who? Gorbunov?" "Of course! Who else but he?
Forgive me, comrades. I didn't mean to stray

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so far." "Forget it. Just go on." "I see
I shouldn't dwell on Gorbunov this way . . .

Non-Party! That's the essence of his sham.
And when the mercury in the corner freezes,
he deviates to that side of the room . . .
well . . . toward the heater . . . to the left." "Prodigious!"
"Is he at all religious?" "Is a hymn?
He is exceedingly releg-religious!
Sometimes I am afraid the day will come
he'll drop down on his knees in front of us
and start demanding God appear to him."
"Being non-Party, naturally he's nervous."

"So: 'deviations to the left.' " "Ha-ha!"
"Dear colleague, what's so funny?" "Just the plain
stupidity of what you said just now.
Look: if the heater, as we ascertain,
is left of Gorchakov, then it must . . ." "Ah!
Be right of Gorbunov! Like King and Queen
in chess. Well, to be safe we won't withdraw
either opinion, but instead maintain
the presence of the two phenomena."
"What's a good song without a good refrain?"

"Well, doctors, now we have our diagnosis . . .
Staple the pages! . . . Gorchakov, please sign
here at the bottom." "Haven't got my glasses."
"Why not use mine?" "Okay. Let's see: 'We find
some deviations to the left at places' . . .
No doubt of that! . . . 'and to the right' . . . That's fine!
Both are correct. We'll fix these lordly asses.
Either we will exterminate their kind,
or . . ." "Thank you, comrade Gorchakov. It pleases
us that you'll be released at Eastertime."

"Thanks. Thank you. Yes, I thank you. Should I make
a waist-deep bow, do something as a token? . . .

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Where's Gorbunov? This time I've got to shake
some sense into that . . . God, what lies I spoke in
there . . . Oh, forget that dendroid paranoiac! . . .
What have I done that I should feel so shaken? . . .
The spindle loses its own thread and breaks
when the warp under it begins to weaken.
How strange it is that Gorchakov should speak
the crazy words that Gorbunov has spoken."

Canto 5

A Song in the Third Person

"He said to him." "And then he said to him."
"And then he said." "He answered." "And he said."
"Then he." "And he . . ." "Said words into the wind."
"Gazing into the darkness." "And he said
again to him." "To say 'he-said', however,
is not the same as saying what he said."
"And then he said, 'Why get bogged down in clever
talk of details; it's all clear. Period."
"One he-said flows into the next he-said."
"Till the he-saids of sin and penance flow
together." "And on the table stands the bred
he-said." "And in the end they form a row
of Tartar Yokes." "And then he said to him."
"And he connected his he-said to chime
with the he-said whose echo was grown dim."
"And then he said to him; and filled the time."

"And then he said." "It is as when a stone
is thrown into a pond. The rings—one, two,
six . . ." "And he said." "The rings are really one,
although the radius gets stretched, it's true."
"He said—a ring." "He said—another ring."
"And his he-said collided with the shore."
"And that he-said, as it was traveling
back, butted him." "And the New World's no more."

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"He said." "He said." "He said." "He said." "He said."
"A train!" "And on a line that never fails."
"And starting at the station of He-said."
"None wants, you know, to lie down on the rails."
"And then he said." "But in response he said."
"He said then vanished." "On the platform see
he-said." "He said." "But if he-said's a dead
object, should not the same be true of 'he'?"

"And he to him." "And he." "And he to him."
"Okay, let's say the evening has begun."
"And he to him." "And it's no idle whim
to think the two together are but one."
"A question—'he.'" "Whose answer is—'to him.'"
"And vice versa." "Yes, they are the same."
"Though there's a strip of light dividing them."
"Only so each can have a different name."
"Is he related, then, to him?" "Does not
the world of senseless objects boast of some
relations closed to analytic thought?"
"If not a relative, a sort of chum?"
"What won't the judge's chamber analyze!
The judge sits down; his glasses have no glass."
"Then what is he to him?" "A thin disguise
for the he-said." "Which beats in-laws, I guess."

"A massive building. Many stories. Two
mugs pale from breathing stench that they can't flee."
"They are not here." "Where have they wandered to?"
"To the he-said-to-him or to the 'he.'"
"A massive building. Through the window peer
two silhouettes." "It's pandemonium,
as in a station." "It's never silent here?"
"Just in the gaps between he-said-to-him."
"The silence is so dear, let's call it she."
"But we've been talking of the 'said' of 'he.'"
"Well, all in all, the silence pleases me."
"Anathema resounds less threateningly."

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"So in this place they're scared of silence?" "No,
they are united by He-said, the way
they are by time and place. It is as though
some grand instinct to incest were at play."

"And that's a form of action, isn't it?"
"Oh, yes! And they are full of interplay."
"And will they ever quit?" "They'll never quit."
"The way a proper name won't go away."
"That's right. Because a name's a sort of prism
allowing no enjambents, splitting, slight
omissions, dashes,—any kind of schism."
"For it's a vehicle of questions, right?"
"Precisely! Which is why the most direct
speech is, in fact, the most oblique." "And you
risk injury or loss when you neglect
this simple fact." "And when we harken to
all that the He-said is about to speak,
like children in a church we stand agog,
as if we were communing on a peak
attained before the mounting dialogue."

"What did you dream about, He-said-to-Him?"
"The doctors are closeby." "So what? Go on."
I dreamed of waves. I dreamed that I could swim
far out to sea." "Unrealistic! Un- . . ."
"Already he's forgotten all about
his mushrooms." "That's impossible!" "Could be."
"He's simply speaking for them both, no doubt."
"That sort of thing absorbs infinity."
"I saw a host of waves pass in review
as clearly as could be. And as they passed
I saw the sky, and just as clearly too . . ."
"That's something like a double-barreled blast."
"I saw the crests, like manes of horses when,
tied to a sinking wagon, their sole thought
is to break free." "And weren't there drowning men
or shipwrecks?" "Aivasovsky I am not!

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I saw the spuming breakers. And the shore
like a huge horseshoe . . . And I saw far off
the He-said bustling though the clouds. It wore
the smile of Gorbunov, of Gorchakov."

Canto 6

Gorbunov and Gorchakov

"Well, what'd you dream of this time, Gorbunov?"
"But I've already told you all about
my meeting with the doctors." "Knock it off.
I overheard it all, you know, from out
there in the hall." "I'm saying, Gorchakov . . ."
"That you dream only of the sea, no doubt."
"That's right, the sea." "You are beyond belief."
"I don't insist on your belief. It's not
important." "What a tangled web you weave
with all your lying. One can always spot

a bad egg by its putrid odor. Phew!"
"Just shut your mouth!" "Why should I shut my mouth?"
"Oh, Gorchakov, I know you through and through . . ."
"You've taken x-rays, right?" "Your funny stuff
is out of place, you know. You might live to
regret it." "Oh, imagine that!" "Don't laugh . . .
How is it the commission always knew
what we'd discussed as soon as you'd gone off?
You played the stoolie for them, didn't you?
How like a bride you're blushing, Gorchakov."

"You're angry." "I'm not angry." "Don't torment
me, Gorbunov." "I-you? That's funny!" "See,
you're angry." "No, I'm not. And if you want
I'll even swear to God." "But that would be
unpleasant for you." "I'm not hesitant."
"You seemed to say that with sincerity."
"What? Are you starting that again? I can't

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believe you think it's worthwhile watching me."
"Why don't you swear then?" "I'm afraid you won't
believe me if I do." "Well, probably."

"Now that remark needs some deciphering."
"I'm mixing up the chaff and wheat." "You are
simply against believing anything:
not words, not even holy signs." "There's war
in the Crimea—smoke hazing everything.
That's something, isn't it? I quote from our
grandfather Krylov . . . Prison's the next thing
for you, you know." "You ought to go before
you're sent there." "Hey, what's so astonishing
out there?" "*Orlova, Ulanova . . . each a star.*"

"I think I'll walk out in the hall." "Why?" "Oh,
no reason. Just a headache. It's a crime
the way you're always asking questions, though.
What are you seeking anyway, sublime
truths?" "Hell, I saw you goggling at the snow!"
"You shit! I'm sure you play the stoolie." "I'm
merely extending my horizons." "Though
without belief." "A sceptic in his prime!
Denunciations, conversations—so
it goes, and somehow brightens up the time."

"And somehow time helps brighten up the days."
"I think my head is better. Well, you haven't
told me your dream. Come on, no more delays."
"Oh, all that's melancholy and repugnant . . .
It's better watching how the night displays
its lights there on the window." "Like a pageant . . ."
"Orlova! Ulanova, too, who stays
in the dim background." "Coffee's cold." "They meant
a lot, you know. We were at war, and they
were symbols in their way of the home front."

"The second half of February. Look where

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the hands are pointing." "Just the radius
of zero." "And the numerals?" "Well, they're
like figures on the border of a dish . . .
I saw a set of plates and silverware
made à la Meissen . . ." "Ah, the spurious!"
"It said: 'The King's Workshop.' Beneath it there
appeared a sun—a burning jet of gas."
"I'd like some gin right now." "Well, if they care
to pass out water bottles, I won't fuss . . .

Look at the shadows streaming from the bushes!"
"Excuse me, but the clock is something I'd
like to return to . . ." "Well, if it amuses . . ."
"Oh, Gorbunov, why must you make such snide
remarks to me?" "Your own lips are the basis . . ."
"Well, is it really zero?" "Yes." "But why?"
"Because outside is merely empty spaces."
"But, then, outside is colder than inside."
"Well, no . . . You should regard these heated places
as merely products of the cold outside."

"And what about the woodpiles?" "Well, I guess
they're links between outdoors and in-." "Oh Lord,
the wind is whistling through the crevices!
I'm freezing, and so hungry my gut's sore."
"No, doctors aren't as big as sicknesses."
"An inner sanctum's greater than a door."
"Though it's, you know, a shelter nonetheless."
"Don't be a hypocrite. And furthermore,
remember, Gorchakov: the utterness
of speech, of uttered words, transcends the power

of disbelief." "Yes, cold surpasses heat."
"So, too, the clock hands are inferior
to Time." "The hollow in the tree can't beat
the Tree." "Though hollows are superior
to squirrels." "Who are certainly more sweet

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than eagles." "And the fish . . . that thing . . . so
pure . . ."
"I want to strip down naked, head to feet!"
"Where there's a radius, there's, as it were,
a fork and plate." "And burnt wood . . ." "Can't compete
with a hot water bottle, that's for sure."

Canto 7

Gorbunov and Gorchakov

"Had supper?" "Yeah, a dish of day-old greens.
It's always greens." "We've got the right to eat
bird-food here. Still, it's no use making scenes."
"But why do they forbid us to eat meat?"
"Look, there's new firewood stacked up between . . ."
"I have a perfect right to be upset!"
"No, the administration's right. I mean,
it's right within the radius it set."
"Neither my belly nor my head's real keen
to squeeze inside it." "Well, let's not repeat

a conversation we've already had . . .
Besides, my kidney's acting up." "But I—
I am outside the radius." "You're mad!
Outside! Who's standing here before me?" "Why . . .
a shell." "Well, as a child in Leningrad
the soul's infinitude was something I
heard talked about quite often. Period."
"Oh no, aside from that. I'm married. My
wife—and my daughter too—they're both outside."
"Oh, take a long cold shower." "Where?" "Well, try

Opochka Station." "Some dream place?" "Like hell!
More likely you dreamed me." "Opochka's way
out somewhere in the provinces." "Right." "Well,
you get around." "I ought to run away."

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"Why waste the time and effort? I can tell
you've really put down roots here anyway."
"You've put down roots here too." "In general,
I've gotten lazy, though I am, they say,
swift as the wind. It's really not my style
to go around in hiking boots." "Okay,

calm down." "I am." "How much'd you make?" "A few
hundred, old currency." "Where at?" "A place in . . ."
"Are you afraid that I'll report on you?"
"Who would deny himself the fine sensation?"
"My silence isn't going to save you." "True.
Yes, well, you know, on reconsideration . . ."
"You'd rather think that I'll report on you
than try to speculate on a location."
"Alas, my genealogy is too
poor to perform such airy speculation."

"So why attack the menu?" "It's the rut
of eating . . . Well, I'm not a veteran,
and the same menu morning, noon, and . . ." "But
you're using restaurants as comparison."
"I'm stretching out the radius somewhat
to get my family in." "They slaughtered one
fat lamb a night at home, no doubt." "Well, what
I'm getting at is that it's still too soon
for me to let go of the past." "Oh, cut
the crap." "Why call it crap?" "It's overdone."

"The radius takes in my family."
"So much the worse for you." "But understand:
I'm only one leg of the compass. They,
the stationary leg, support me." "And
somehow this helps to brighten up the day,
this wider radius you now command?"
"The narrower. Down here that's just the way
things are: some move as strangers, others stand

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still." "Though a stationary lamppost, say,
reflected in a puddle will expand."

"I'm moving! Look!" "I don't know where the start
is, but I know the end's in Leningrad
snowdrifts." "I move, therefore I am. Descartes
would envy me." "Of course! It makes me glad
to see enthusiasm from the heart."
"And your soul mumps and mental slums, I'm sad
to say, just bore me." "What about your chart—
the dipper, skyscrapers, the myriad . . .?"
"Aries in the ascendant, curing March."
"A telescope's one thing I wish we had."

"Precisely! It'd be possible to see
our distant sponsors." "The progenitors
of motion." "Making the stability
of both Opochka and Kamchatka ours."
"Born in late March, it is my destiny
to wander. They fingerprinted me . . . The stars
can't stop our trembling. What a pity we
have such unstable sponsors!" "It occurs
to me that, as an Aries, you should be
wearing a hat of Karakulan furs."

"You think I'm trembling from the cold?" "That's why
your fingers have turned blue." "And you? What is
your sign?" "Well, I belong to Gemini.
Born under Gemini, in May." "I guess
that makes you warm." "I guess." "Come on. Don't try
to play the genius with non-geniuses."
"Compared to you it's obvious that I
am scarcely cold at all." "Oh, stop all this!"
"Well, Gorchakov, what's wrong?" "It's all a lie!"
"Oh no, it's true—the months and all." "Alas,

we'll never get a telescope. And thus

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we'll never see our distant sponsors." "You're
forgetting that, although the radius
is scorned in life, the compass will endure
forever, Gorchakov." "It's hideous—
the possibility of dying here
believing it's the end." "Ridiculous!
You won't die." "No? You think not?" "Yes." "You're sure?"
"Of course. It is impossible for us
to bear again the burdens that we bear."

Canto 8

Gorchakov in the Night

"Your argument assures me that, though dead,
I will exist. My brain's been swamped by you.
It's coiled like sheets and blankets on a bed . . .
My own lamp doesn't flame as it used to . . .
Colitis is a curse! And in my head,
like demons in a bottle, thoughts of you!
Your light does not drive off the dark! Instead,
oh, Gorbunov, the blood is seething through
my cranium, because of what you said.
The sawdust blazing from the spark you threw!

He's gone . . . Left me to watch the night dial spin,
and talk alone . . . Before he left he stored
some apples as security . . . And then,
like Pilate, he took off! I am so bored
I'll curl up in the corner and examine
my bathrobe's outer folds . . . And I'll bombard
my head with last night's salad in this tin . . .
And sit beneath my bowler and regard . . .
What stars? A ceiling and a floor. And in
the window—the reflection of the ward.

Night. Windows swirl the ward and double it.
The bulwarks of infinity! They're all

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encased in shutters, though, and don't permit
their own reflections farther than the wall.
In that space—rear end forward—one's a bit
uncertain just whose bed is whose. I'd fall
asleep now if I could, though I admit
I'd rather kill myself, in general.
And thus—since here a thing's its opposite—
risk delving deeper still into my soul.

I'd like to fall asleep . . . The orderlies
are still on duty . . . Does the room's reflection
help them at all? It merely multiplies
the mess . . . Infinity is multiplication.
I watch myself expand before my eyes,
and panes of glass, in my imagination,
compress a mile into the space that lies
between the bunks. I feel a fiery sensation,
gazing at that far star. Thus, gravity's
a matter merely of deceleration.

Sleep is the stuff that keeps us normal. Or
that helps us, rather, to recuperate.
Hey, Gorbunov! . . . What do I need him for?
What in the hell for? . . . Let's abbreviate
speech by a Gorbunov. No gossip's more
explicit than a dream, no eye as great.
Freud says that everyone's a prisoner
of dreams . . . How strange it is to meditate
on this again . . . When there's no other cure
the grave, of course, will make a hunchback straight . . .

And this disordered medley serves to break
the silence of the beds at which I stare . . .
I always feel my very life's at stake
when I don't have an interlocutor.
It is in words alone that I partake
of life. They need a witness and an heir!
And Gorbunov, you are, make no mistake,

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my Judge! While I am but an agent here,
connecting sleep and sleeplessness. And make
appraisals of a front beyond repair.

Night. The vent window . . . Oh, if the male nurse
would only open it . . . But it's no use
to even ask . . . My face and neck rehearse
themselves in that locked square. It would produce
a leakage in the image—that's perverse!
The grossest sort, in fact, of self-abuse!
And something else makes leakage even worse:
since Leningrad's not far, it might induce
some dumb degenerate to set a course
and have his head just take off on the loose.

Oh, Gorbunov! Like any simpleton,
I feel I'm nothing but the radius
of the clock-hand! There isn't anyone,
I don't think, waiting for me, piteous,
here or beyond the bordered plate. A fun-
ny story! These dimensions are, alas,
too small for you. Your suffering lies on
ahead. For you his range was ordered thus.
The horror there will be a variation
of a dance step or opening in chess

that makes them tired of waiting. And I sin
only in that my call won't get to you.
You, Gorbunov! As long as I am in
this world, I know I must surrender to
your power! I raise my prayers to you. I can
go nowhere that your words do not pursue
me . . . Come to me, I beg you, speak again!
I need your words! Let them resound anew!
If I've denounced them, it has only been
because, though you depart, I'm never through,

I cannot part with them . . . Oh, Gorbunov,
forgive me, please! It isn't that I cling

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to you from fear of parting . . . It's enough
to stretch out one clenched fist to you to bring
me freedom . . . Oh, like all one can't shake off—
source of boredom and dispiriting
indifference—forget me, Gorbunov,
forgive me. Like an echo laboring
to save sounds from oblivion, I love
and I betray you, too, to suffering."

Canto 9

Gorbunov and the Doctors

"Well, Gorbunov, we've brought you here to tell
us everything." "About?" "Your dreams." "About
the compass." "And your daughter." "And the shell."
"And give us names, details." "Well, first, I doubt
my daughter figures in my dreams at all."
"Come off it, Gorbunov. Don't make us shout."
"Okay. I dreamed about the sea." "Oh, hell!"
"Let's do without the wet stuff." "And without
'anchors aweigh' and 'o'er the seas' as well."
"Opochka seems a good place to start out."

"What do you need that for?" "For your own good."
"A line that smacks . . ." "It's necessary. We . . ."
". . . that smacks of questions that Red Riding Hood
asked granny. You'll recall, I'm sure, that she
asks her about her ears . . . 'Don't be afraid' . . .
she answers . . . 'Oh, I am afraid' . . . 'He-he—
the better, dear, to hear you with.' " "Who would
have thought that you'd behave so cowardly!"
"And anyway the little girl gets saved."
"There is a plus in everything, you see."

"Say something, Gorbunov." "You realize
that we'll get angry if you make us wait
too long." "What are you waiting for?" "For lies
unmet by protests to evaporate."

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"And what then?" "Well, I think it would be nice
for us to speak as equals." "Oh, I hate
his whimpering, his stupid shrugs and sighs.
Nurse, an injection will facilitate . . ."
"He's trembling." "Naturally. The needle's size
has caused his thinking to accelerate."

"Well, Gorbunov, recalled your dream?" "It was
just of the sea." "No chanterelles?" "In short,
alas, there were no more of them." "Alas?"
"A habit. I got used to their support."
"It often happens that when women pass
away or go away their men resort
to words of grief like that." "You're right: 'alas'
is a man's word. In quotes." "But it's the sort
of word one's likely to hear widows use."
"We'll put that down as well in the report."

"Dreams bare the secret canvas of a man,
of what takes place inside." "And what the eyes
observe is far less interesting than
what's hidden, for the reason that . . ." "What lies
outside is Gorchakov. I know." "Well, then,
the point is not the mischievous disguise
he has assumed, but that your dreams show an
unhealthy tendency toward the abyss."
"You make my dream seem almost Stygian.
But mouths of rivers speak not of demise

but just the opposite: of procreation."
"It's scarcely bearable that any freak
or bum should dump descendants on the nation."
"A pity. For the river, as the Greek
philosopher remarked, though flowing, stays in
one place." "Which is the riddle all men seek
to solve." "And the Newtonian equation."
"Newton again!" "And what's outside?" "A week
in February. Time of hibernation,
denunciations, snowstorms." "It's unique

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among the months in terms of days." "A kind
of cripple." "Don't you think it's easier
to live through?" "Shamefully. In fact, I find
it easier than easy to endure."
"And rivers?" "What about them?" "Don't they bind
themselves in ice?" "But it was man we were . . ."
"Know what awaits you?" "I suspect a signed
certificate committing me." "Yes sir!
Considering the things you have in mind,
you'll stay forever here, our prisoner."

"What for? . . . however, well, it's obvious
one must control oneself to be let go."
"And call for Gorchakov?" "One can discuss
the stars with him." "Of course." "Which goes to show
that there's a plus in most things." "Yes, a plus!"
"And he, like God, is omnipresent, though
he's in the habit of denouncing us."
"A horseshoe is held up by nails, you know."
"How strange that Gorbunov, nailed to the cross,
must look for help from Gorchakov below."

"But why exaggerate like this? Why wallow
in thoughts of Golgotha?" "But can't you see,
it's a catastrophe." "Amazing! Well, so
eternity is a catastrophe,
you think?" "It's just the bung that plugs the bunghole.
That's why he doesn't want eternity."
"Yes, this is all too hard for him to follow."
"Hey, Gorbunov, you want a cup of tea?"
"Oh, why have you foresaken me?" "Dear fellow,
whom are you calling to?" "He seems to be

lamenting Gorchakov again." "Why not
his daughter or his wife? Why Gorchakov?"
"The whole thing's egotism." "You're sure we've got
it right? It's really Gor . . ." "Hey, Gorbunov!
Look here, your fate has been decided." "What
of Gorchakov's?" "Well, live with the rebuff:

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we're freeing him. From now on it's your lot
to live without that creep." "From this day forth,
as always happens when life comes to naught,
eternity begins." "Speech signing off."

Canto 10

A Conversation on the Porch

"A massive city in its twilight shroud."
"The streets, like lines in ledgers, parallel."
"A massive madhouse stands." "Looks like a void
existing at the center of the well-
planned universe." "The front obscures from view
an icy courtyard filled with snow and cords
of wood." "Which is a conversation, too,
since all these things have been described in words."
"But there are men in there who've gone berserk
from pondering too long the tomb and womb."
"But what about the *men*? I mean, this quirk
of ours of saying men for those in whom
we see our likeness?" "Note the eyes, the frame—
head, sturdy shoulders, legs, and arms that reach . . ."
"The minute that we give a thing a name
that thing's transformed into a part of speech."
"But what about the body?" "It obeys
the rule." "And what about this place?" "It's called
a madhouse." "And the days?" "They are called days."
"Oh, the whole world's becoming just a walled

Sodom of hungry words. Where do they get
the right? From whom?" "Well, that's a name that rings
a nasty bell." "One soon gets sopping wet
with a head stuffed with words devouring things."
"No question but it makes a man's head spin."
"As seas make Gorbunov's; it's for the birds."
"And so it's not the sea that surges in
to shore, but words with overlapping words."

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"And words are sort of holy relics." "Yes,
though they were hung up once . . . Names are defence
against the very things that they express."
"Against the sense of life?" "Well, in a sense."
"Do they defend against Christ's Passion too?"
"Against all passions." "God forbid!" "For he
fashioned His lips to words . . . But then he drew
forth words in His defence." "Well, basically,
that's why His life is so prophetic. It's
a guarantee we won't go down, but swim."
"And thus His life's the one thing that admits
two meanings." "It's, therefore, a synonym."

"But what about eternity? Does it
stand like a he-said in a Cossack coat?"
"It is the only word that hasn't yet
devoured its earthly object in its throat."
"A hardy word-shield!" "Hardly." "He who makes
the cross sign on his chest gets saved at last."
"Not wholly." "Yes, the synonym now shakes
with age; the age of saving souls has passed."
"That's true." "But what of love? Can love not stem
the tide of aimless chatter?" "Either you've
just dropped down from the sphere of seraphim,
or you're confusing potency with love."
"No word is so devoid of tell-tale signs."
"And there's no cover that has so devoured
its object, obfuscating its designs.
And nothing is so rending as this word."
"But if one looks at it objectively,
the general observation can be made
that words are also things." "And thus that we
are saved." "By silence only, I'm afraid.

For silence is the future of the days
approaching speech, with all we emphasize
in it, as in our greetings silence pays
homage to our inevitable goodbyes.

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Plus, silence is the future of the words
whose hungry vowels have gobbled up their things,
abhorring, as they do, rectangulars;
a wave that veils eternity's bright rings.
Plus, silence is the future of all love,
a space, not an impediment, but space
depriving love's heartfelt falsetto of
its echo, of its natural response.
Plus, silence is the present for all those
who lived before us. Silence, like a fat
match-maker, binding everybody, grows
the present's speechifying habitat.
For life is but a speech thrust in the face
of silence." "Gestures, quarrels, men incensed."
"A twilight talking to a murky close."
"With walls that stand like arguments against."

"A massive city in its twilight shroud."
"A speech by chaos, rendered plain as hell."
"Here stands the massive madhouse, like a void
existing at the center of the well-
planned universe." "God damn this draft! It hurts."
"Your 'damns' don't hurt my ears or anyone's.
It isn't life here, but a wreath of words."
"Damn how it verbalizes from the nouns."
"And thus, you know, a bird in need of food
soars upward from the shelter of its nest."
"And thus a star, climbing above the rude
plain, seeks a brighter conversationalist."
"And all night long, as far as one can see,
with postal slowness, in its turn, the plain
keeps talking too." "How can it possibly?"
"By means of knolls, by means of the terrain."
"How can one tell these windbags so far off
apart, though there's no point in doing so?"
"The higher pitch belongs to Gorbunov;
the lower, well, that's Gorchakov, you know."

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Canto 11

Gorbunov and Gorchakov

"Well, what'd you dream of this time?" "Nothing new."
"Then I won't ask." "What's this? You feeling wracked
by shame or something suddenly?" "No, view
it simply as a sense of measure, tact."
"How very kind of you." "What can I do?
This place has gotten to me. And the fact . . ."
"What fact?" "That I have landed here." "Oh, you
are capable of causing cardiac
arrest. Just take your facts and go to, to . . ."
"Come off it now, we've got to interact."

"Why? What's in it for you?" "Hell if I know."
"Well, it's no matter . . . So you're leaving. When?"
"Right after Easter." "And from here you'll go . . .?"
"Home." "They won't hesitate to take you in?"
"They won't." "Where do you live?" "The address? Oh,
I never give that out to anyone."
"That strikes me as a lie." "If you say so."
"Don't tell me fairy tales." "But then again
you won't be coming by to visit." "No?
And why is that?" "Because the outcome's been

decided." "Then you're right." "I think I'm right."
"You think so?" "Oh, I didn't mean to say
that . . . Sorry, it just popped out. I've no right
to doubt a thing." "What will you do from day
to day at home?" "That's classified." "In spite
of saying we should talk, you talk this way?
Extremely strange." "It's just my nature." "Bite
this apple. That should please you." "Sure, okay.
But it won't make me any more forthright . . .
'Lift-n-heave, lift-n-heave; take 'er away,

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let 'er go'—that's my kind of work. Believe
me, pal, all others are superfluous."
"My eyes! They've come to shroud me! Lift-n-heave,
take 'er away—that is synonymous
with what is taking place right now." "Don't grieve.
We promise not to drop you?" " 'We'? What does
'we' mean?" "Don't be afraid. Before I leave
I'll teach you to read palms." "Well, in that case
I turn my back on you." "You mean that we've
no friendship left? There's no more to discuss?

You ought to be a little kinder, pal."
"I was this way at birth, apparently."
"Existence, though, deter . . ." "Some tea? "Sure." "Shall
I warm it up?" "No, cold's all right with me . . .
mines consciousness." "That's far more logical
a sentence read from right to left." "I see!
You think I am a Jew?" "As I recall,
the guy who picked the apple from the Tree
of Knowledge was a Jew." "Eve picked it, pal."
"Apparently, it was both she and he."

"But still, he had a real intelligence.
Scion of science! And his name's a thing
that gets high marks." "What? Marx? That's rather dense.
That deter-mining is enough to bring
this place down on my head." "The evidence
suggests he also tasted suffering.
And been the head of nations ever since."
"Panmongolism! Syllables that ring
a lot of bells!" "And also, in a sense,
he was condemned." "To parting?" "Party-ing."

"What, then, is parting?" "Jees, why linger on
this word?" "It's for my files, which I endeavor
to keep up." "Parting—it depends upon
the person—that's what matters most. However,
the place you live in matters too. Can one

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remain there as some nondescript whomever?
And if from someone close, to whom he's gone
and for how long both matter." "If forever?"
"Well, then you stare into the dark alone,
into the sort of dark that eyelids sever,

for dreams' sake, from the clarity of light.
And shiver somewhat, failing to dispel
its thickness, more from sorrow than from fright.
And you've got neither sea nor chanterelle."
"And if it's spring?" "In spring it's never quite
as hard to manage." "Well, that's hard to tell."
"It may be hard, but now it's very white
outside." "Then you're like something yanked the hell
out of a field." "Though that's a bloodless sight,
unlike a gum." "I guess it is God's will . . .

And what does parting mean to you?" "Decay . . .
Doors closed behind you as you disappear.
And, if it's day, the brilliance of the day."
"And if it's night?" "At night the atmosphere
comes into play—perhaps a single stray
light or a bench in some deserted square."
"And does the memory of a loved one stay
with you for long?" "You'd better be more clear."
"Well, after losing me what will you say?"
"In general, loss isn't hard to bear."

"What? Isn't hard to bear? But why then spout
those protestations on the holiness
of friendship?" "That's true even now. Without
that, living here together would distress
us far too much. For as I've said throughout
our talks, existence . . ." "Damn your captiousness!
Don't use that word!" "Well, being . . ." "Yes, no doubt
when there's no trace of me, nonbeingness
will flatter all the flatness roundabout."
"You'll be, therefore, the silence I possess."

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Canto 12

Gorbunov and Gorchakov

"Had supper?" "Yeah, I have. And you?" "I had
it too." "Well, how'd you like the cabbage soup?"
"Well, cabbage soup, of course, is pretty sad
in terms of its consistency." "It's true
that, as a rule, the stuff is simply fluid.
So says the proverb." "With a dash or two
of vinegar, it wouldn't taste so bad."
"Oh, everything is empty." "Yes, but you
can make out differences in taste." "I'm mad
for something I can sink my teeth into."

"In this place into which we have been cast,
there's nothing left to do but to begin
a month before the start of Lent to fast."
"You're speaking of the madhouse once again?"
"Is our geography so very vast?"
"And afterwards?" "You always ask that! When
is afterwards?" "When the cross-time is passed."
"What does that mean?" "It's just an idiom."
"You'd think they'd use some basil leaves at least."
"Though as before they'd pour some bromide in."

"Yeah, none of this will turn out well, I fear.
This bromide really is bad stuff." "Bad stuff!
It causes all your hair to disappear!
Just look at any pillow: Babanov
deposits daily some of his gray hair;
Mickiewicz sheds his eyebrows; and I have
a bald spot on my crown. This stuff will wear
you down, make you anemic, Gorchakov."
"Between the devil and a rib—that's where
it sits, so we don't wreck our brains with love."

"I took it in the army." "You alone?"
"No, everyone, of course . . . 'Prevantaver',

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that was the name we gave it. Just one spoon
and Ulanova and Orlova were
unnecessary." "God, my hair has grown
so blond! My part's a wreck! No character . . .
I wanted to live long enough to groan
about gray hair . . ." "But you're forgetting . . ." "Sir,
what is it I'm forgetting?" "From now on,
you might not need it." "Not need what?" "The fur."

"You're right." "Don't tremble, pal." "I'm nearly numb."
"Then stick your hands inside the bed." "Aye-aye."
"So tell me, what is love?" "You're tiresome,
you know . . . I told you . . ." "But you can't deny
that every sound has several levels, some
low, some . . ." "Love is the preface to goodbye."
"It can't be." "I am ready to become
a public monument to lies, The Lie,
so that my children's children may all come
and fart on me." "You fool! You know that I

said that from boredom." "Damn! It's cold as hell
in here." "They've puttied shut the cracks." "A stroke
of genius! . . . Look, the heater's cold as well."
"This place is always cold and dirty . . . Look,
the star above that tree is visible
without a telescope." "Though as you spoke
another star rose up, invisible."
"Well, it occurs to me, just as a joke:
what if the cross were cut and piled up, well,
for wood, would it resume its shape in smoke?"

"You're nuts." "No, just showing some concern
for your affairs." "Praiseworthy charity!
What do you want, though, really?" "The return
of warmth to a damned cold extremity."
"Yes, all of mine are just about to turn
to ice." "I'm right." "There's inhumanity
in that . . . Let's lay the logs out so they burn
starlike." "You're right: stars bring eternity

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to mind, unlike the cross." "In their sojourn,
stars bring to mind a bad infinity."

"What time is it?" "Apparently, it's night."
"Oh, please, don't start in on the Zodiac."
"My wife is outside. Parting is the plight
of marriage too." "Someday I'll take a whack
at marriage, but for you it wasn't right."
"You know what? More and more, I see the fact
I'm married really fills you up with spite."
"You should have wed the darkness." "I can't hack
monotony. In fact, I take delight
in each domestic jam and cul-de-sac."

"What time is it?" "It's almost zero." "Oh,
that's late." "I'll tell you, I don't like the smell
of numbers. I consider every *o*
to be a plus sign in the making." "Well,
my lips have formed a circle . . . Goes to show
I bite and yawn, no doubt . . . Just what the hell
does tossing everything together go
to show?" "The dizzying, white pinnacle
of Elbruz." "Did the earth go quid pro quo
and dig a hole?" "It showed that it was yellow."

"If sorrow's going to be your leitmotif,
consider Golgotha, for March 15,
the Ides of March, is almost here, and I've
made up my mind to jump in some ravine."
"Or wrap yourself up in a cloud, as if
in a black Persian veil. And in that scene
you'll play the spirit." "Well, you measure with
a yardstick of your own, thus your pristine
two-headed peak won't fit on mine, whose gift
is making courtyard drifts a mountain chain."

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Canto 13

Conversations about the Sea

"Your argument assures me I'm immortal.
But to the sorrow of your prophecy,
I've got an invalid's post-mortem pall.
Your light does not drive off the dark from me,
no more than does the night-light in the hall
drive off my dreams. I don't reproach you. We
must stop reproaching. That is, after all,
the whole point. Let the light burn! In my see-
sawing eyes something's seething like a squall
from off the sea. I think it is the sea."

"Night. Hospital. A hostile atmosphere.
The shame I suffer from that light is keen.
It's like the cold that shakes me when I hear
your voice. Because the sea is just a green
concavity. And though the truth is dear,
I won't go down into its dark demesne.
I will not harm you. Oh, enough! It's clear
that you yourself cannot decide between
thinking it is the sea or . . . sorrow. Dear
Lord, what's it all about? What does it mean?"

"Perhaps it is the sea . . . and a great maze
of gulls above an old hag tossing them
crusts from a rotting pier. And like the waves
her flounce flaps in the wind, her ragged hem
slapping against her shoes. So, in a blaze
of screeching battle, there she stands, her slim
hands tossing bread, and stares into the haze . . .
As if, become far-sighted for a time,
she held a bee in Turkey in her gaze."

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"Yeah, that's the sea. Precisely that. The deep
of life from which, like knights in chain-mail coats,
we all appeared so long ago to sweep.
And if you hadn't struck this distant note
again just now, I would have let it sleep,
forgetting that, in fact, the world has got
a bottom and horizon and some types
of space besides this one where it's our fate
to stare at painted walls and lilac stripes.
'But who hath ears to hear, let him be mute.' "

"There's something bigger in the world than us,
something that warms us, though it does not warm
itself, that with the help of Boreas
stuffs holes with hills, as though instructing them
how best to be of one another's use.
I feel as though I'm striding through a dream;
upstairs, to Eden, downstairs, to abyss,
on to the threshold of Elysium,
alone, amid the blooming crests that form
the sleepless moving stairs of Nereus."

"But the sea's a too-foreign element
to buy the story of some 'Tally ho'
across it. Ice, of course, is different.
No, Gorbunov, the end of all your woe
is not in sight. It looks like you are meant
to measure out your griefs in years, as though
you were a member of the tribes that went
on the old Exodus . . . And where you'll go,
to whom you'll call, there where the firmament
and sea seem one, there is no way to know."

"My soul's too weak for calling. From now on,
wherever fate sees fit for me to be,
from Paradise to squatting in the john,
not painted walls but waves are what I'll see.
And that's not bragging, Gorchakov. A man

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like me, in such a waterheavenly
mess, well, what would my pleas be for? For one
who hath the hearing, the artillery
fire of waves is far more pleasant than
a tearful prayer that this cup pass from me."

"But that's a sin! . . . What's wrong with me? Somehow,
I've managed to forget, preoccupied
with cursing you, the wood . . . Well, anyhow,
you asked me what I dreamed, I think. I tried
expressing it in words—that dreams, you know,
are the day's heritage. And you replied
that chanterelles are islands. Which shows how
extremely difficult it is inside
a human head. You seeing the sea now?
Nonsense! It's still a dream, though justified

perhaps." "And what is sleep?" "The very core
of cores." "Like rivers, then, in which we sink."
"We sink into the darkness, cripple. Your
imagination isn't in the pink."
"Sleep's just an exit from the blackness." "You're
forgetting, Gorbunov, the age! Your stink-
ing dream's not new!" "Man is not new." "Why bore
me, then, with talk of man?" "Because I think
man's something dreams must take the credit for."
"And what about a man is most distinct?"

"The eyelids. Close them, you see darkness, right?"
"But in the light . . ." "In light, too, as a rule . . .
And suddenly you see, your eyes shut tight,
a feature. Then a second . . . third . . . You feel
your ears hum; your mouth's cold. Then you catch sight
of children running on a quay, a gull
above a woman, catching crusts in flight . . ."
"Am I not present in this chronicle,
there on the parapet?" "And it's all quite
real—far more real than you there on your stool."

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Canto 14

Conversation in a Conversation

"But that's delirium! You hear! Well, look,
we need a witness . . . Babanov, you'll do.
Now, in a robe without a belt or hook
I'm standing on the stool here in plain view.
Well, Gorbunov, you see me, right?" "I took
no notice." "Of my long johns?" "Are they blue?"
"Then watch how easily your portrait breaks!
Oh, Gorbunov, the sea will be a stew
now that the wind's begun to blow! You, snake,
you hear?" "I have already answered you."

"So that's the way it is! Well, then, let's use
our fists! Taught! Blockheads must be taught a lesson!
Take that! Well, now, can you conjecture whose
hand hit you—mine or Babanov's?" "That session,
well, was it . . . Gor-banov's?" "So you refuse
to blame me! You'd forgive my sins! Your ocean
will burst the faucets soon, and you'll know whose!"
"He-he." "What are you laughing at, you chicken-
brained lunatic?" "Hey, what's all the noise?"
"Get lost, Mickiewicz!" "I'm a veteran in

this place, and if a pal has closed his eyes,
the more so as it's night already, those
around him should, I think, shut up." "You flies!
I slugged him, well, because . . . He didn't close
his eyes from pain." "I really do advise
you to shut up." "Mickiewicz, your brain loose
or what? What's wrong with you? It isn't wise,
you know, opposing me." "I'll bust your nose!"
"Ouch, ouch, my corns!" "What's going on, you guys?"
"Damned if I know." "Oh, someone got his toes

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stepped on." "Watch it, I hear the doctors!" "Jeesus Christ! Into the sack, quick!" "I'm in bed."
"And Gorbunov, don't you so much as sneeze.
Just cover up and . . ." "But he's really dead
asleep already." "What?" "Shut up, the keys!"
"Asleep? Impossible! You're cracked." "I said
shut up, you cretin!" "Babanov, don't tease."
"Leave him alone." "Oh, I'll just squeeze his head . . ."
"Just you try squealing, Gorbunov." "But he's
asleep." "This time the doctors will see red."

"How should you greet your doctors?" "By showing some
respect . . . Get up, you crippled lunatics!"
"You got a gripe about the grub, you scum?"
"There was a fight in here, I heard it." "Nix,
my friend, there wasn't." "Don't be quarrelsome.
The night clerk said he heard a fight." "I'll fix
that liar!" "Save your tricks, we're not so dumb."
"Whose stream is that?" "Some dick's." "Who mentioned
dicks?"
"I asked you whose it is, not where it's from."
"Yes, whose? An eagle's?" "Yours, you Cossack pricks."

"Mickiewicz!" "Yeah?" "Well, wipe it up, you creep!"
"We take good care of you, you can't deny it."
"What's wrong with Gorbunov?" "Uh . . . he's asleep."
"Ah! And why haven't you gone sleepyby yet?"
"We're just about to." "Right. Bad little sheep."
"We're going." "And you'd better be so quiet
we'll hear a fly buzz. Got it? Not a peep!"
"Excuse me, but I'd like to use the toilet."
"Tomorrow." "Gorchakov, they're in your keep."
"Oh, yes, there's news: A sputnik's gone in orbit."

"They've gone." "Hey, Gorchakov, is that your piss?"
"Go f. . ." "All right, let's close our little eyes."

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"I'd love to have a cake for Easter." "Yes,
to break the fast. Some butter, a good size
salami . . ." "Should have asked the doctor." "Kiss
my ass. You could have done it. He was nice."
"In the confusion I forgot." "I wish
you'd shut . . ." "Hey, look at Gorchakov, you guys!
He's kneeling next to Gorbunov, his lips
pressed close." "He's trying to apologize."

"You're sleeping? Yes, as far as I can tell,
you're really sleeping . . . Oh, how all the strands
lie tangled . . . I don't know how this all befell
us . . . For God's sake, forgive me . . . Here, my hands
at least can raise your pillow . . . Better? Hell,
my soul's all out of harmony. It stands
before you for forgiveness. Sleep. Sleep well.
The truth is that wherever one's glance lands
it doesn't pause. Here, all is obstacle.
From obstacle to obstacle it pans.

Sleep, Gorbunov . . . Until the last retreat
is trumpeted . . . To sit here at your side
is all I want . . . To hell with that shrill trumpet!
And, unlike you, I'm used to being tried,
I'm used to obstacles . . . Forgive my spirit,
so out of harmony . . . Forgive my pride.
Sleep, sleep, my friend. Beside you I will sit—
not over you, not under—just beside.
However long the sentence is, I'll wait
till I see your eyes once more opened wide.

What do you see? The sea? Two seas or more?
You wander through the hallways . . . And fish stare
with dumb expressions out of every door.
I'm right behind you . . . But from God knows where
ten thousand bubbles bubble up before
my eyes . . . And I can't follow, I can't bear

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the pressure . . . What? What's that? My mind's gone
. . . or
delirious from all the talk . . . Look there!
How from the north the wind's begun to roar!
The pillow's squashed, the part's gone in your hair.

1965–1968

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Instruments of Seduction

Norman Rush

The name she was unable to remember was torturing her. She kept coming up with Bechamel, which was ridiculously wrong yet somehow close. It was important to her that she remember. A thing in a book by this man lay at the heart of her secret career as a seducer of men—three hundred and twelve of them. She was a seducer, not a seductress. The male form of the term was active. A seductress was merely someone who was seductive and who might or might not be awarded a victory. But a seducer was a professional, a worker, and somehow a record of success was embedded in the term. "Seducer" sounded like a credential. Game was afoot tonight. Remembering the name was part of preparation. She had always prepared before tests.

Male or female, you couldn't be considered a seducer if you were below a certain age, had great natural beauty, or if you lacked a theory of what you were doing. Her body of theory began with a scene in the book she was feeling the impulse to reread. The book's title was lost in the mists of time. As she

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remembered the scene, a doctor and perhaps the woman of the house are involved together in some emergency lifesaving operation. The woman has to assist. The setting is an apartment in Europe, in a city. The woman is not attractive. The doctor is. There has been shelling or an accident. The characters are disparate in every way and would never normally be appropriate for one another. The operation is described in upsetting detail. It's touch and go. When it's over, the doctor and the woman fall into one another's arms—to their own surprise. Some fierce tropism compels them. Afterward they part, never to follow up. The book was from the French. She removed the Atmos clock from the living room mantel and took it to the pantry to get it out of sight.

The scene had been like a flashbulb going off. She had realized that, in all her seductions up to that point, she had been crudely and intuitively using the principle that the scene made explicit. Putting it bluntly, a certain atmosphere of allusion to death, death fear, death threats, mystery pointing to death, was, in the right hands, erotic, and could lead to a bingo. Of course, that was hardly all there was to it. The subject of what conditions conduce—that was her word for it—to achieving a bingo, was immense. One thing, it was never safe to roll your *r*'s. She thought, Everything counts: chiaroscuro, no giant clocks in evidence and no wristwatches either, music or its absence, what they can assume about privacy and *le futur.* That was critical. You had to help them intuit you were acting from appetite, like a man, and that when it was over you would be yourself and not transformed before their eyes into a loveleech, a limbless tube of longing. You had to convince them that what was to come was, no question about it, a transgression, but that for you it was about at the level of eating between meals.

She was almost fifty. For a woman, she was old to be a seducer. The truth was that she had been on the verge of closing up shop. The corner of Bergen County they lived in was scorched earth, pretty much. Then Frank had been offered a contract to advise African governments on dental care systems. They had come to Africa for two years.

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In Botswana, where they were based, everything was unbelievably conducive. Frank was off in the bush or advising as far away as Lusaka or Gwelo for days and sometimes weeks at a time. So there was space. She could select. Gaborone was comfortable enough. And it was full of transient men: consultants, contractors, travelers of all kinds, seekers. Embassy men were assigned for two-year tours and knew they were going to be rotated away from the scene of the crime sooner rather than later. Wives were often absent. Either they were slow to arrive or they were incessantly away on rest and recreation in the United States or the Republic of South Africa. For expatriate men, the local women were a question mark. Venereal disease was pandemic and local attitudes toward birth control came close to being surreal. She had abstained from Batswana men. She knew why. The very attractive ones seemed hard to get at. There was a feeling of danger in the proposition, probably irrational. The surplus of more familiar white types was a simple fact. In any case, there was still time. This place had been designed with her in mind. The furniture the government provided even looked like it came from a bordello. And Botswana was unnerving in some overall way there was only one word for: conducive. The country depended on copper and diamonds. Copper prices were sinking. There were too many diamonds of the wrong kind. Development projects were going badly and making people look bad, which made them nervous and susceptible. What was there to do at night? There was only one movie house in town. The movies came via South Africa and were censored to a fare-thee-well—no nudity, no blue language. She suspected that for American men the kind of heavyhanded dummkopf censorship they sat through at the Capitol Cinema was in fact stimulating. Frank was getting United States Government money, which made them semi-official. She had to admit there was fun in foiling the eyes and ears of the embassy network. She would hate to leave.

Only one thing was sad. There was no one she could tell about her life. She had managed to have a remarkable life. She was ethical. She never brought Frank up or implied that Frank

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was the cause in any way of what she chose to do. Nor would she ever seduce a man who could conceivably be a recurrent part of Frank's life or sphere. She assumed feminists would hate her life if they knew. She would like to talk to feminists about vocation, about goal-setting, about using one's mind, about nerve and strength. Frank's ignorance was one of her feats. How many women could do what she had done? She was modestly endowed and now she was even old. She was selective. Sometimes she felt she would like to tell Frank, when it was really over, and see what he said. She would sometimes let herself think he would be proud, in a way, or that he could be convinced he should be. There was no one she could tell. Their daughter was a cow and a Lutheran. Her gentleman was late. She went into the pantry to check the time.

For this evening's adventure she was perhaps a little too high-priestess, but the man she was expecting was not a subtle person. She was wearing a narrowly-cut white silk caftan, a seed-pod necklace, and sandals. The symbolism was a little crude: silk, the ultra-civilized material, over the primitive straight-off-the-bush necklace. Men liked to feel things through silk. But she wore silk as much for herself as for the gentlemen. Silk energized her. She loved the feeling of silk being slid up the backs of her legs. Her nape hairs rose a little as she thought about it. She had her hair up, in a loose, flat bun. She was ringless. She had put on and then taken off her scarab ring. Tonight she wanted the feeling that bare hands and bare feet would give. She would ease off her sandals at the right moment. She knew she was giving up a proven piece of business—idly taking off her ring when the occasion reached a certain centigrade. Men saw it subliminally as taking off a wedding ring and as the first act of undressing. She had worked hard on her feet. She had lined her armpits with tissue which would stay just until the doorbell rang. With medical gentlemen, hygiene was a fetish. She was expecting a doctor. Her breath was immaculate. She was proud of her teeth, but then she was married to a dentist. She thought about the Danish surgeon who brought his own boiled-water ice cubes

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to cocktail parties. She had some bottled water in the refrigerator, just in case it was indicated.

Her gentleman was due and overdue. Everything was optimal. There was a firm crossbreeze. The sightlines were nice. From where they would be sitting they would look out at a little pad of healthy lawn, the blank wall of the inner court, and the foliage of the tree whose blooms still looked to her like scrambled eggs. It would be self-evident that they would be private here. The blinds were drawn. Everything was secure and cool. Off the hall leading to the bathroom, the door to the bedroom stood open. The bedroom was clearly a working bedroom, not taboo, with a night light on and an oscillating fan performing on low. He would sit on leather; she would sit half-facing, where she could reach the bar trolley, on sheepskin, her feet on a jennet-skin karosse. He should sit in the leather chair because it was regal but uncomfortable. You would want to lie down. She would be in a slightly more reclining mode. Sunset was on. Where was her gentleman? The light was past its peak.

The doorbell rang. Be superb, she thought.

The doctor looked exhausted. He was greyfaced. Also, he was older than the image of him she had been entertaining. But he was all right. He had nice hair. He was fit. He might be part Indian, with those cheekbones and being from Vancouver. Flats were never a mistake. He was not tall. He was slim.

She led him in. He was wearing one of the cheaper safari suits, with the S-for-something embroidery on the left breast pocket. He had come straight from work, which was in her favor.

When she had him seated, she said, "Two slight catastrophes to report, doctor. One is that you're going to have to eat appetizers from my own hand. As the British say, my help are gone. My cook and my maid are sisters. Their aunt died. For the second time, actually. Tebogo is forgetful. In any case, they're in Mochudi for a few days and I'm alone. Frank won't be home until Sunday. *And*, the Webers are off for tonight. They can't come. We're on our own. I hope we can cope."

He smiled weakly. The man was exhausted.

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She said, "But a cool drink, quick, wouldn't you say? What would you like? I have everything."

He said it should be anything nonalcoholic, any kind of juice would be good. She could see work coming. He went to wash up.

He took his time in the bathroom, which was normally a good sign. He looked almost crisp when he came back, but something was the matter. She would have to extract it.

He accepted iced rooibos tea. She poured Bombay gin over crushed ice for herself. Men noticed what you drank. This man was not strong. She was going to have to underplay.

She presented the appetizers, which were genius. You could get through a week on her collations if you needed to, or you could have a few select tastes and go on to gorge elsewhere with no one the wiser. But you would remember every bite. She said "You might like these. These chunks are bream fillet, poached, from Lake Ngami. No bones. Vinaigrette. They had just started getting these down here on a regular basis on ice about a year ago. AID had a lot of money in the Lake Ngami fishery project. Then the drought struck, and Lake Ngami, poof, it's a damp spot in the desert. This is real Parma ham. I nearly had to kill someone to get it. The cashews are a little on the tangy side. That's the way they like them in Mozambique, apparently. They're good."

He ate a little, sticking to mainstream items like the gouda cheese cubes, she was sorry to see. Then he brought up the climate, which made her writhe. It was something to be curtailed. It led the mind homeward. It was one of the three deadly *W*'s: weather, wife, and where to eat—in this country, where not to eat. She feigned sympathy. He was saying he was from British Columbia so it was to be expected that it would take some doing for him to adjust to the dry heat and the dust. He said he had to remind himself that he'd only been here four months and that ultimately his mucous membrane system was supposed to adapt. But he said he was finding it wearing. Lately he was dreaming about rain. A lot, he said.

Good! she thought. "Would you like to see my tokoloshi?" she asked, crossing her legs.

He stopped chewing. She warned herself not to be reckless.

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"Dream animals!," she said. "Little effigies. I collect them. The Bushmen carve them out of softwood. They use them as symbols of evil in some ceremony they do. They're turning up along with all the other Bushman artifacts, the puberty aprons and so on, in the craft shops. Let me show you."

She got two tokoloshi from a cabinet.

"They call these the evil creatures who come to you at night in dreams. What you see when you look casually is this man-like figure with what looks like the head of a fox or rabbit or zebra, at first glance. But look at the clothing. Doesn't this look like a clerical jacket? The collar shape? They're all like that. And look closely at the animal. It's actually a spotted jackal, the most despised animal there is because of its taste for carrion. Now look in front at this funny little tablet that looks like a huge belt buckle with these x-shapes burned into it. My theory is that it's a Bushman version of the Union Jack. If you notice on this one, the being is wearing a funny belt. It looks like a cartridge belt to me. Some of the tokoloshi are smoking these removable pipes. White tourists buy these things and think they're cute. I think each one is a carved insult to the West. And we buy loads of them. I do. The black areas like the jacket are done by charring the wood with hot nails and things."

He handled the carvings dutifully and then gave them back to her. He murmured that they were interesting.

He took more tea. She stood the tokoloshi on an end table halfway across the room, facing them. He began contemplating them, sipping his tea minutely. Time was passing. She had various mottoes she used on herself. One was: Inside every suit and tie is a naked man trying to get out. She knew they were stupid, but they helped. He was still in the grip of whatever was bothering him.

"I have something that might interest you," she said. She went to the cabinet again and returned with a jackal-fur wallet, which she set down on the coffee table in front of him. "This is a fortune-telling kit the witch doctors use. It has odd things inside it." He merely looked at it.

"Look inside it," she said.

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He picked it up reluctantly and held it in his hand, making a face. He was thinking it was unsanitary. She was in danger of becoming impatient. The wallet actually was slightly fetid, but so what? It was an organic thing. It was old.

She reached over and guided him to open and empty the wallet, touching his hands. He studied the array of bones and pebbles on the tabletop. Some of the pebbles were painted or stained. The bones were knucklebones, probably opossum, she told him, after he showed no interest in trying to guess what they were. She had made it her business to learn a fair amount about Tswana divination practices, but he wasn't asking. He moved the objects around listlessly.

She lit a candle, though she felt it was technically premature. It would give him something else to stare at if he wanted to and at least he would be staring in her direction, more or less.

The next segment was going to be taxing. The pace needed to be meditative. She was fighting impatience.

She said, "Africa is so strange. You haven't been here long, but you'll see. We come here as . . . bearers of science, the scientific attitude. Even the dependents do, always telling the help about nutrition and weaning and that kind of thing.

"Science so much defines us. One wants to be scientific, or at least not *un*scientific. Science is our religion, in a way. Or at least you begin to feel it is. I've been here nineteen months . . ."

He said something. Was she losing her hearing or was the man just unable to project? He had said something about noticing that the tokoloshi weren't carrying hypodermic needles. He was making the point, she guessed, that the Batswana didn't reject Western medicine. He said something further about their attachment to injections, how they felt you weren't actually treating them unless they could have an injection, how they seemed to love injections. She would have to adapt to a certain lag in this man's responses. I am tiring, she thought.

She tried again, edging her chair closer to his. "Of course, your world is different. You're more insulated, at the Ministry,

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where everyone is a scientist of sorts. You're immersed in science. That world is . . . safer. Are you following me?"

He said he wasn't sure that he was.

"What I guess I mean is that one gets to want to really *uphold* science. Because the culture here is so much the opposite. So relentlessly so. You resist. But then the first thing you know, very peculiar things start happening to you. Or you talk to some of the old settler types, whites, educated people from the protectorate days who decided to stay on as citizens, before the government made that such an obstacle course. The white settlers are worse than your everyday Batswana. They accept everything supernatural, almost. At first you dismiss it as a pose."

She knew it was strictly pro forma, but she offered him cigarettes from the caddy. He declined. There was no way she could smoke, then. Nothing tonight was going to be easy. Bechamel was right next door to the name she was trying to remember: why couldn't she get it?

"But it isn't a pose," she said. "Their experiences have changed them utterly. There is so much witchcraft. It's called *muti*. It's so routine. It wasn't so long ago that if you were going to open a business you'd go to the witch doctor for good luck rites with human body parts as ingredients. A little something to tuck under the cornerstone of your bottle store. People are still being killed for their parts. It might be a windpipe or whatever. It's still going on. Sometimes they dump the body onto the railroad tracks after they've taken what they need, for the train to grind up and disguise. Recently they caught somebody that way. The killers threw this body on the track but the train was late. They try to keep it out of the paper, I know that for a fact. But it's still happening. An undertow."

She worked her feet out of her sandals. Normally she would do one and let an intriguing gap fall before doing the other. She scratched an instep on an ankle.

She said, "I know a girl who's teaching in the government secondary in Bobonong who tells me what a hard time the matron is having getting the girls to sleep with their heads out

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of the covers. It seems they're afraid of *bad women* who roam around at night, who'll scratch their faces. These are women called *baloi* who go around naked, wearing only a little belt made out of human neckbones. Naturally, anyone would say what a fantasy this is. Childish.

"But I really did once see a naked woman dodging around near some rondavels late one night, out near Mosimane. It was only a glimpse. No doubt it was innocent. But she did have something white and shimmering around her waist. We were driving past. You begin to wonder."

She waited. He was silent.

"Something's bothering you," she said.

He denied it.

She said, "At any rate, don't you think it's interesting that there are no women members of the so-called traditional doctor's association? I know a member, what an oaf! I think it's a smoke screen association. They want you to think they're just a benign bunch of herbalists trying out one thing or another a lot of which ought to be in the regular pharmacopeia if only white medical people weren't so narrow-minded. They come to seminars all jolly and humble. But if you talk to the Batswana, you know that it's the women, the witches, who are the really potent ones."

Still he was silent.

"Something's happened, hasn't it? To upset you. If it's anything I've said, please tell me." A maternal tone could be death. She was flirting with failure.

He denied that she was responsible in any way. It seemed sincere. He was going inward again, right before her eyes. She had a code name for failures. She called them case studies. Her attitude was that every failure could be made to yield something of value for the future. And it was true. Some of her best material, anecdotes, references to things, aphrodisiana of all kinds, had come from case studies. The cave paintings at Gargas, in Spain, of mutilated hands . . . handprints, not paintings . . . stencils of hundreds of hands with joints and fingers missing. Archaeologists were totally at odds as to what all that meant. One case study had yielded the story of fat

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women in Durban buying tainted meat from butchers so as to contract tapeworms for weight loss purposes. As a case study, if it came to that, tonight looked unpromising. But you could never tell. She had an image for case studies: a grave robber, weary, exhausted, reaching down into some charnel mass and pulling up some lovely ancient sword somehow miraculously still keen that had been overlooked. She could name case studies that were more precious to her than bingoes she could describe.

She had one quiver left. She meant arrow. She hated using it.

She could oppose her silence to his until he broke. It was difficult to get right. It ran counter to being a host, being a woman, and to her own nature. The silence had to be special, not wounded, receptive, with a spine to it, maternal, in fact.

She declared silence. Slow moments passed.

He stirred. His lips stirred. He got up and began pacing.

He said, "You're right." Then for a long time he said nothing, still pacing.

"You read my mind!" he said. "Last night I had an experience . . . I still . . . it's still upsetting. I shouldn't have come, I guess."

She felt sorry for him. He had just the slightest speech defect, which showed up in noticeable hesitations. This was sad.

"Please tell me about it," she said perfectly.

He paced more, then halted near the candle and stared at it.

"I hardly drink," he said. "Last night was an exception. Phoning home to Vancouver started it, domestic nonsense. I won't go into that. They don't understand. No point in going into it. I went out. I went drinking. One of the hotel bars, where Africans go. I began drinking. I was drinking and buying drinks for some of the locals. I drank quite a bit.

"All right. These fellows are clever. Bit by bit I am being taken over by one, this one fellow, George. I can't explain it. I didn't like him. He took me over. That is, I notice I'm paying for drinks but this fellow's passing them on to whomever he chooses, his friends. But I'm buying. But I have no say.

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"We're in a corner booth. It's dark and loud, as usual. This fellow, his head was shaved, he was strong-looking. He spoke good English, though. Originally, I'd liked talking to him, I think. They flatter you. He was a combination of rough and smooth. Now he was working me. He was a refugee from South Africa, that always starts up your sympathy. Terrible breath, though. I was getting a feeling of something being off about the ratio between the number of drinks and what I was laying out. I think he was taking something in transit.

"I wanted to do the buying. I took exception. All right. Remember that they have me wedged in. That was stupid, but I was, I allowed it. Then I said I was going to stop buying. George didn't like it. This man had a following. I realized they were forming a cordon, blocking us in. Gradually it got nasty. Why wouldn't I keep buying drinks, didn't I have money, what was my job, didn't the Ministry pay expatriates enough to buy a few drinks? So on ad nauseam."

His color was coming back. He picked up a cocktail napkin and touched at his forehead.

He was looking straight at her now. He said, "You don't know what the African bars are like. Pandemonium. I was sealed off. As I say, his friends were all around.

"Then it was all about apartheid. I said I was Canadian. Then it was about Canada the lackey of America the supporter of apartheid. I'm not political. I was scared. All right. When I tell him I'm really through buying drinks he asks me how much money have I got left, exactly. I tell him again that I'm through buying drinks. He says not to worry, he'll sell me something instead. All right. I knew I was down to about ten pula. And I had dug in on buying drinks, the way you will when you've had a few too many. No more buying drinks, that was decided. But he was determined to get my money, I could damned well see that.

"He said he would sell me something I'd be very glad to know. Information. All right. So then comes a long runaround on what kind of information. Remember that he's pretty well three sheets to the wind himself. It was information I would be glad to have as a doctor, he said.

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"Well, the upshot here was that this is what I proposed, so as not to seem totally stupid and taken. I would put all my money down on the table in front of me. I took out my wallet and made sure he could see that what I put down was all of it, about ten pula, change and everything. All right. And I would keep the money under the palm of my hand. And he would whisper the information to me and if I thought it was a fair trade I would just lift my hand. Of course, this was all just facesaving on my part so as not to just hand over my money to a thug. And don't think I wasn't well aware it might be a good idea at this stage of things to be seen getting rid of any cash I had, just to avoid being knocked down on the way to my car."

"This is a wonderful story," she said spontaneously, immediately regretting it.

"It isn't a story," he said.

"You know what I mean," she said. "I mean, since I see you standing here safe and sound I can assume the ending isn't a tragedy. But please continue. Really."

"In any event. There we are. There was more back and forth over what kind of information this was. Finally he says it's not only something a doctor would be glad of. He is going to tell me the secret of how they are going to make the revolution in South Africa, a secret plan. An actual plan.

"God knows I have no brief for white South Africans. I know a few professionally, doctors. Medicine down there is basically about up to 1950, by our standards, despite all this veneer of the heart transplants. But the doctors I know seem to be decent. Some of them hate the system and will say so.

"I go along. Empty my wallet, cover the money with my hand.

"Here's what he says. They had a sure way to drive out the whites. It was a new plan and was sure to succeed. It would succeed because they, meaning the blacks, could bring it about with only a handful of men. He said that the Boers had won for all time if the revolution meant waiting for small groups to grow into bands and then into units, batallions and so on, into armies that would fight the Boers. The Boers were

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too intelligent and had too much power. They had corrupted too many of the blacks. The blacks were divided. There were too many spies for the Boers among them. The plan he would tell me would take less than a hundred men.

"Then he asked me, if he could tell me such a plan would it be worth the ten pula. Would I agree that it would? I said yes."

"This is extraordinary!" she said. *Duhamel!*, she thought, triumphant. The name had come back to her: *Georges Duhamel*. She could almost see the print. She was so grateful.

"Exciting!" she said, gratitude in her voice.

He was sweating. "Well, this is what he says. He leans over, whispers. The plan is simple. The plan is to assemble a shock force, he called it. Black people who are willing to give their lives. And this is all they do: *they kill doctors.* That's it! They start off with a large first wave, before the government can do anything to protect doctors. They simply kill doctors, as many as they can. They kill them at home, in their offices, in hospitals, in the street. You can get the name of every doctor in South Africa through the phone book. Whites need doctors, without doctors they think they are already dying, he says. Blacks in South Africa have no doctors to speak of anyway, especially in the homelands where they are all being herded to die in droves. Blacks are dying of the system every day regardless, he says. But whites would scream. They would rush like cattle to the airports, screaming. They would stream out of the country. The planes from Smuts would be jammed full. After the first strike, you would continue, taking them by ones and twos. The doctors would leave, the ones who were there and still alive. No new ones would come, not even Indians. He said it was like taking away water from people in a desert. The government would capitulate. That was the plan.

"I lifted my hand and let him take the money. He said I was paying the soldiery and he thanked me in the name of the revolution. Then I was free to go."

He looked around dazedly for something, she wasn't clear what. Her glass was still one third full. Remarkably, he picked it up and drained it, eating the remnants of ice.

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She stood up. She was content. The story was a brilliant thing, a gem.

He was moving about. It was hard to say, but possibly he was leaving. He could go or stay.

They stood together in the living room archway. Without prelude, he reached for her, awkwardly pulled her side against his chest, kissed her absurdly on the eye, and with his free hand began squeezing her breasts.

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Four Poems by Molly Peacock

Desire

It doesn't speak and it isn't schooled,
like a small foetal animal with wettened fur.
It is the blind instinct for life unruled,
visceral frankincense and animal myrrh.
It is what babies bring to kings,
an eyes-shut, ears-shut medicine of the heart
that smells and touches endings and beginnings
without the details of time's experienced *part-fit-into-part-fit-into-part.* Like a paw,
it is blunt; like a pet who knows you
and nudges your knee with its snout—but more raw
and blinder and younger and more divine, too,
than the tamed wild—it's the drive for what is real,
deeper than the brain's detail: the drive to feel.

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The Breach of *Or*

Broken lines continue, you know, way past
their breaks, as medians in roads do, or
the dot tracings in kids' books, where the last
point is the first point. But it's the breach of *or*,
the breach a break makes when it skids into
nothingness that I'm panicked will undo
me into an enervated void.
That's why I love you; it's how I avoid
the blank *or* between the black lines. That's why
I love my friends. Taking a pencil with
a heavy lead that will leave a line, wide
and black in its wake, connects given lines with
something almost equal to them. Imagine
a little boat trying to connect two
shores with its wake. It's futile. Now look in
the boat at the picnickers, those two
lovers crowded among pears, cantaloupes, fried
squid and fluttering, flag-like, paper napkins—
watch them wipe their lips, open their arms wide,
embracing each other, laughing about their sins.
A pencil made this. Black lines tried
to equal them. The void was a matter of my pride.

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Cloth God

Never so deeply in love as I am
have I been,
never so nourished by touch as I am

right now. Being depends on having been
before or without,
just as loss depends on having had. Pin

gauze between past and now. It forms doubt.
This doubt will wrap
itself around a loss until the loss, about

to vanish before it was given shape,
stands in a cloth body,
pain brought into presence, a tactile trap.

Hard to lose loss once it has a body
to stand in your path,
a body shaped around doubt's odd lie,

that what is not, is. Such upended faith
is a false cloth god.
As loss depends on having had in truth

and having truly given up the hard
fact, so does being
depend on giving up before. The blood

coursing through loving is feeling being
lived past loss.
The gauze that stopped the bleeding

can't become what's gone. So I have you,
as I've lost the past I've grown through.

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Here

Putting a burden down feels so empty
you almost want to hoist it up again,
for to carry nothing means there is no "me,"

almost. Then freedom, like air, creeps in
as into a nearly airtight house, estranging
you and your burden, making a breach to leap in,

changing an airless place into a landscape,
an outdoors so full of air it leaves you breathless
there's so much to breathe. Now you escape

what you didn't even know had held you.
It's so big, the outside! How will you ever carry it?
No, no, no, you are only meant to live in it.

This wide plain infused with a sunset? Here?
With distant mountains and a glittering sea?
With distant burdens and a glittering "me," here.

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Three Poems by Baron Wormser

1969

Cynical millenarian, I like
You in this shot, posed without
Insignia or emblems,
Just a plain white tee shirt

And housepainter's pants
Because that is what you are,
An anonymous workman
In the first year of the

Reign of Richard Nixon,
No longer a peace sign kid
Yet still smoking a jay
Each evening for old time's sake,

An accommodation of ecstasy.
The uncertain fun is over,
The wages of definition
Must be paid,

A spontaneous decade ends
In the scrape of the putty
Knife, the money that makes
One week talk to another.

You could be elsewhere
And you know it
But your smile remains.
A false perpetuum sets in

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Of Saturday night beers,
Secondhand paperbacks, lengthy
Letters, and pragmatic affairs.
In your hand is your cap

And now it seems that
You too were a soldier,
That this wariness will
Never go away and that

That is a fact, like an
Address, like the neat
Inscription "Draft dodger
Turns twenty-two today."

Postcard Bearing a Portrait of Chief Joseph

Staring at the landscape of their pain
I swat at the fog of inevitability,
Try not to feel that no one knows
What he or she is doing—
Whether a hundred years ago
In these hills or today
Or the future any sensible person doubts.
I fail, feel only the chill of near-dawn,
Day's destruction of mystery.
As a white man, my ignorance—
Traditionally—is holy.
After the fact
Comes sympathy, as if we could
Only love what was ruined or absent,
Purge passion with elegy.

Any tourist will tell you:
Envisioning is our medicine.
I, too, hope to see what I can't see.

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Meanwhile I rehearse history:
I know the Nez Perce
Didn't care what decade it was
Or whether it was better than the last one.
I know they didn't discover radium,
Ballet, or free will.
They seemed more or less content to live
In their particular backwater of eternity,
Indifferent to the million mottoes
That drove the white people,
Humbled by earth and sky.

Had we been more European we would have
Put them in zoos and taken them
For the spirit of ineffectual genius.
As it was, we didn't argue with death
Or the need to do something with boys
Who wanted to be soldiers. Not even
The generic name we bestowed on them
Made any special sense, but all this land
Was food on millions of tables. Who were
Some illiterate savages to stand in the way
Of Rutherford B. Hayes' restless yeomanry?
There are no more savages anyway. We are
All kin to the same passable hopes,
All feel pious towards the notable dead,
All mean, like the Chief, to live in peace.
You can visit out here, rent a car,
Stand on one of these ridges,
And hear the wail
That is nothing but the wind.

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Elegy for a Detective

Bemusement was the better part of sanity,
And sanity was your glance past the surly
Occasion to the sheer morning or moment
When life relaxed and admitted all it
Wanted to do was live. "I'm happy when
The car starts and the coffee is hot," you said
And tacitly wished that our feelings would
Leave it at that. No luck—
The pirouettes of imagination never let up:
Borders changed overnight, gun shots became
Compliments, and much-praised love was
Our most condign misunderstanding, the
Hurtling of hope into the brevities of flesh.
Laconic interrogator, you smiled at all this repetition
And collected duplicates—the same childhood
Memory, the same half-confession half-threat.
From your desk were taken the manufactures
Of what the genteel call our civilization,
A shroud of candy wrappers, lottery
Tickets, gum, sports pages,
Receipts, a haircomb, cigarettes.

Death empties our pockets,
The common usages remain silent.

If we say that we are more than
This phantasmagoria of sustenance and environment,
That our confusions yield the most unexpected fruit
And that our understanding is our best accomplice —
That is our pleasure. I think of your gentle
Contempt for humanity's evasive talkiness.
Solutions mock us, back and forth we go
On a bridge of words, between
What we intend and what we forget.

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Six Poems by Linda Gregg

With a Blessing Rather than Love Said Nietzsche

The square stone room makes a shape in the air
to rest inside. A form for holding what is loved
beyond naming. With gratitude and reverence
as Nietzsche said. We have other ways,
other places. Like figs left on the stone shelf
above the patio as a gift.
You go out and return with fruit you've picked
and I make jam for our crepes and yogurt
and we eat. It is still morning and we look
at each other even though we have known each other
for years. You take me on your lap
in the chair by the open window and pull off
the shirts over our heads so we can feel the air
and embrace and kiss high up on the mountain
in the shaded room by the screen window
where the air comes in and keeps touching us
and we are happy beyond saying, beyond
any sounds even. Less than nothing and deeper.

Summer

In this palace which is said to be
a replica of heaven
the poets have quit again
for the season because of the heat.

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Taken By Each Thing

The day is taken by each thing and grows complete.
I go out and come in and go out again,
confused by a beauty that knows nothing of delay,
rushing like fire. All things move faster
than time and make a stillness thereby. My mind
leans back and smiles, having nothing to say.
Even at night I go out with a light and look
at the growing. I kneel and look at one thing
at a time. A white spider on a peony bud.
I have nothing to give and make a poor servant,
but I can praise the spring. Praise this wildness
that does not heed the hour. The doe that does not
stop at dark but continues to grow all night long.
The beauty in every degree of flourishing. Violets
lift to the rain and the brook gets louder than ever.
The old German farmer is asleep and the flowers go on
opening. There are stars. Mint grows high. Leaves
bend in the sunlight as the rain continues to fall.

Days

Moon is hobbled and placed in a field.
Listens to cicadas and watches the cripple
walk to the restaurants to play his bagpipe
for what little they give. The goats
with her bleat and jump happily on the rocks.
She looks at the mountains she knew
and feels like weeping, but does not.
Eats leaves from the fig tree that grows
over the wall. Her reaching up and pulling
rings the bell around her neck. Maybe,
she thinks, it's the beginning of something.

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Still, Clenched, Attentive

The fir, poplar and eucalyptus around the house
move each in its own way in the same wind.
Then a man comes easily through the trees
with some urgent duty, like Hermes with his orders
memorized. He is fearsome because he does not care
about me personally. Merely wants.
He calls and I do not answer. It is like war.
He knocks on the door and I slide down the wall.
Hug my knees, hear my breathing. He walks around
to the windows and I lie on my stomach.
He calls my name. He does not tell me why he has
come.
The lights are out, but he can see the fire is burning.
I know he knows I am there. Knows how much I am
afraid.

Twelve Years After the Marriage She Tries to Explain How She Loves Him Now

Beyond the mountain is a meadow with iris.
The shade of the firs determines the measure
of their color. Violet so pale the purple
is almost not there. The difference
between air and the sky's blue.
The iris hold color because they are a thing—
but faintly, making both the substance
and the invisible more clearly there.

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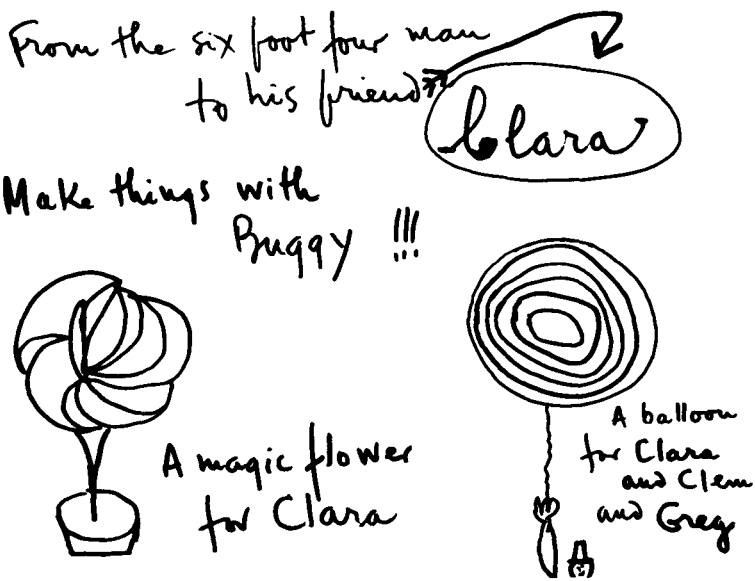
1/9/77

Querido Greg: Aquí tienes los papeles con algunas notas y correcciones. Todo va muy bien y tú eres más Greg que nunca.

Abrazos a Clem y Clara

y a ti

Julio



A note from Julio Cortázar to his translator, Gregory Rabassa, and a drawing sent to Rabassa's daughter, Clara, "from the six foot four man."

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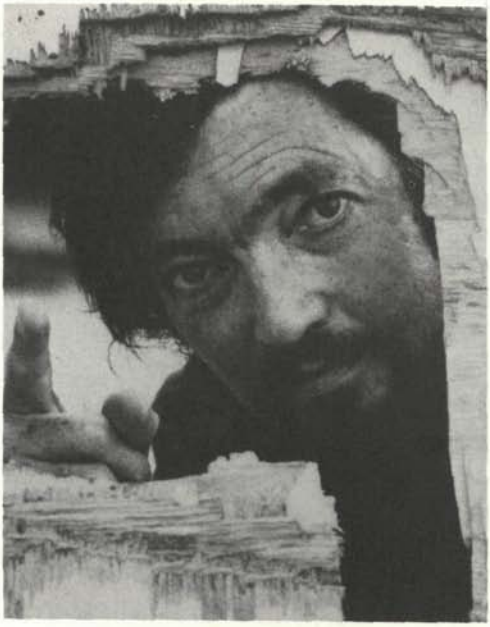

Photo: © Anne de Brunhoff

The Art of Fiction LXXXIII
Julio Cortázar

When Julio Cortázar died of cancer in February, 1984, at the age of sixty-nine, the Madrid newspaper El Pais *hailed him as one of the Hispanic world's greatest writers and over two days carried eleven full pages of tributes, reminiscences, and farewells.*

Though Cortázar had lived in Paris since 1951, he visited his native Argentina regularly until he was officially exiled in the early 1970s by the Argentine junta, who had taken exception to several of his short stories. With the victory, last fall, of the democratically elected Alfonsín government, Cortázar was able to make one last visit to his home country. Alfonsín's Cultural Minister chose to give him no official welcome, afraid that his

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political views were too far to the left, but the writer was nonetheless greeted as a returning hero. One night in Buenos Aires, coming out of a cinema after seeing the new film based on Osvaldo Soriano's novel, No Habra Ni Mas Pena Ni Olvido, *Cortázar and his friends ran into a student demonstration coming towards them, which instantly broke file on glimpsing the writer and crowded around him. The bookstores on the boulevards still being open, the students hurriedly bought up copies of Cortázar's books so that he could sign them. A kiosk salesman, apologizing that he had no more of Cortázar's books, held out a Carlos Fuentes novel for him to sign.*

Cortázar was born in Brussels in 1914. When his family returned to Argentina after the war, he grew up in Banfield, not far from Buenos Aires. He took a degree as a schoolteacher and went to work in a town in the province of Buenos Aires until the early 1940s, writing for himself on the side. One of his first published stories, "House Taken Over," which came to him in a dream, appeared in 1946 in a magazine edited by Jorge Luis Borges. It wasn't until after Cortázar moved to Paris in 1951, however, that he began publishing in earnest. In Paris, he worked as a translator and interpreter for UNESCO and other organizations. Writers he translated included Poe, Defoe, and Marguerite Yourcenar. In 1963, his second novel, Hopscotch — *about an Argentine's existential and metaphysical searches through the nightlife of Paris and Buenos Aires — really established Cortázar's name.*

Though he is known above all as a modern master of the short story, Cortázar's four novels have demonstrated a ready innovation of form while, at the same time, exploring basic questions about man in society. These include The Winners *(1960),* 62: A Model Kit *(1968), based in part on his experience as an interpreter, and* A Manual for Manuel *(1973), about the kidnapping of a Latin American diplomat. But it was Cortázar's stories that most directly claimed his fascination with the fantastic. His most well-known story was the basis of Antonioni's film by the same name,* Blow-Up. *Five collections of his stories have appeared in English to date, the most recent being* We

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Love Glenda So Much. *Just before he died, a travel journal was published,* Los Autonautas de la Cosmopista, *on which he collaborated with his wife, Carol Dunlop, during a voyage from Paris to Marseille in a camping van. Published simultaneously in Spanish and French, Cortázar signed all author's rights and royalties over to the Sandinista government in Nicaragua; the book has since become a best-seller. Two posthumous collections of his political articles on Nicaragua and on Argentina have also been published.*

Throughout his expatriate years in Paris, Cortázar had lived in various neighborhoods. In the last decade, royalties from his books enabled him to buy his own apartment. The apartment, atop a building in a district of wholesalers and chinaware shops, might have been the setting for one of his stories: spacious, though crowded with books, its walls lined with paintings by friends.

Cortázar was a tall man, 6'4", though thinner than his photographs revealed. The last months before this interview had been particularly difficult for him, since his last wife, Carol, thirty years his junior, had recently died of cancer. In addition, his extensive travels, especially to Latin America, had obviously exhausted him. He had been home barely a week and was finally relaxing in his favorite chair, smoking a pipe as we talked.

INTERVIEWER

In some of the stories in your most recent book, *Deshoras*, the fantastic seems to encroach on the real world more than ever. Have you yourself felt as if the fantastic and the commonplace are becoming one?

JULIO CORTÁZAR

Yes, in these recent stories I have the feeling that there is less distance between what we call the fantastic and what we call the real. In my older stories, the distance was greater because the fantastic really *was* fantastic, and sometimes it touched on the supernatural. Of course, the fantastic takes on metamor-

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phoses; it changes. The notion of the fantastic we had in the epoch of the gothic novels in England, for example, has absolutely nothing to do with our concept of it today. Now we laugh when we read Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*—the ghosts dressed in white, the skeletons that walk around making noises with their chains. These days, my notion of the fantastic is closer to what we call reality. Perhaps because reality approaches the fantastic more and more.

INTERVIEWER

Much more of your time in recent years has been spent in support of various liberation struggles in Latin America. Hasn't that also helped bring the real and the fantastic closer for you, and made you more serious?

CORTÁZAR

Well, I don't like the idea of "serious," because I don't think I am serious, at least not in the sense where one speaks of a serious man or a serious woman. But in these last few years, my efforts concerning certain Latin American regimes—Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and now above all Nicaragua—have absorbed me to such a point that I have used the fantastic in certain stories to deal with this subject—in a way that's very close to reality, in my opinion. So, I feel less free than before. That is, thirty years ago I was writing things that came into my head and I judged them only by esthetic criteria. Now, though I continue to judge them by esthetic criteria, first of all because I'm a writer—I'm now a writer who's tormented, very preoccupied by the situation in Latin America; consequently that often slips into my writing, in a conscious or in an unconscious way. But despite the stories with very precise references to ideological and political questions, my stories, in essence, haven't changed. They're still stories of the fantastic.

The problem for an engagé writer, as they call them now, is to continue being a writer. If what he writes becomes simply literature with a political content, it can be very mediocre. That's what has happened to a number of writers. So, the problem is one of balance. For me, what I do must always be literature,

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the highest I can do . . . to go beyond the possible. But, at the same time, to try to put in a mix of contemporary reality. And that's a very difficult balance. In the story in *Deshoras* about the rats, "Satarsa,"—which is an episode based on the struggle against the Argentine guerrillas—the temptation was to stick to the political level alone.

INTERVIEWER

What has been the response to such stories? Was there much difference in the response you got from literary people and that which you got from political ones?

CORTÁZAR

Of course. The bourgeois readers in Latin America who are indifferent to politics, or those who align themselves with the right wing, well, they don't worry about the problems that worry me—the problems of exploitation, of oppression, and so on. Those people regret that my stories often take a political turn. Other readers, above all the young—who share my sentiments, my need to struggle, and who love literature—love these stories. The Cubans relish "Meeting." "Apocalypse at Solentiname" is a story that Nicaraguans read and reread with great pleasure.

INTERVIEWER

What has determined your increased political involvement?

CORTÁZAR

The military in Latin America—they're the ones who make me work harder. If they were removed, if there were a change, then I could rest a little and work on poems and stories that would be exclusively literary. But it's they who give me work to do.

INTERVIEWER

You have said at various times that, for you, literature is like a game. In what ways?

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CORTÁZAR

For me, literature is a form of play. But I've always added that there are two forms of play: football, for example, which is basically a game, and then games that are very profound and serious. When children play, though they're amusing themselves, they take it very seriously. It's important. It's just as serious for them now as love will be ten years from now. I remember when I was little and my parents used to say, "Okay, you've played enough, come take a bath now." I found that completely idiotic, because, for me, the bath was a silly matter. It had no importance whatsoever, while playing with my friends was something serious. Literature is like that—it's a game, but it's a game one can put one's life into. One can do everything for that game.

INTERVIEWER

When did you become interested in the fantastic? Were you very young?

CORTÁZAR

It began in my childhood. Most of my young classmates had no sense of the fantastic. They took things as they were . . . this is a plant, that is an armchair. But for me, things were not that well defined. My mother, who's still alive and is a very imaginative woman, encouraged me. Instead of saying, "No, no, you should be serious," she was pleased that I was imaginative; when I turned towards the world of the fantastic, she helped by giving me books to read. I read Edgar Allan Poe for the first time when I was only nine. I stole the book to read because my mother didn't want me to read it; she thought I was too young and she was right. The book scared me and I was ill for three months, because I believed in it . . . *dur comme fer* as the French say. For me, the fantastic was perfectly natural; I had no doubts at all. That's the way things were. When I gave those kinds of books to my friends, they'd say, "But no, we prefer to read cowboy stories." Cowboys were especially popular at the time. I didn't understand that. I preferred the world of the supernatural, of the fantastic.

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INTERVIEWER

When you translated Poe's complete works many years later, did you discover new things for yourself from so close a reading?

CORTÁZAR

Many, many things. I explored his language, which is criticized by both the English and the Americans because they find it too baroque. Since I'm neither English nor American, I see it with another perspective. I know there are aspects which have aged a lot, that are exaggerated, but that doesn't mean anything compared to his genius. To write, in those times, "The Fall of the House of Usher," or "Ligeia," or "Berenice," or "The Black Cat," any of them, shows a true genius for the fantastic and for the supernatural. Yesterday, I visited a friend on the rue Edgar Allan Poe. There is a plaque on the street which reads, "Edgar Poe, English Writer." He wasn't English at all! We should have it changed—we'll both protest!

INTERVIEWER

In your writing, in addition to the fantastic, there is a real warmth and affection for your characters.

CORTÁZAR

When my characters are children and adolescents, I have a lot of tenderness for them. I think they are very alive in my novels and in my stories; I treat them with a lot of love. When I write a story where the character is an adolescent, I *am* the adolescent while I am writing it. With the adult characters, it's something else.

INTERVIEWER

Are many of your characters based on people that you've known?

CORTÁZAR

I wouldn't say many, but there are a few. Very often there are characters who are a mixture of two or three people. I have

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put together a female character, for example, from two women I have known. That gives the character in the story or the book a personality that's more complex, more difficult.

INTERVIEWER

Do you mean that when you feel the need to *thicken* a character, you combine two together?

CORTÁZAR

Things don't work like that. It's the characters who direct me. That is, I see a character, he's there, and I recognize someone I knew, or occasionally two who are a bit mixed together, but then that stops. Afterwards, the character acts on his own account. He says things . . . I never know *what* any of them are going to say when I'm writing dialogue. Really, it's up to them. Me, I'm just typing out what they're saying. Sometimes I burst out laughing, or I throw out a page and say, "There, there you've said silly things. Out!" And I put in another page and start over again with their dialogue.

INTERVIEWER

So it's not the characters you've known that impel you to write?

CORTÁZAR

No, not at all. Often, I have an idea for a story, but there aren't any characters yet. I'll have a strange idea: something's going to happen in a house in the country, I see . . . I'm very visual when I write, I see it all, I see everything. So, I see this house in the country and then, abruptly, I begin to situate the characters. At that point, one of the characters *might* be someone I knew. But it's not for sure. In the end, most of my characters are invented. Now, of course, there's myself. In *Hopscotch*, there are many autobiographical references in the character of Oliveira. It's not me, but there's a lot that derives from my early Bohemian days in Paris. Yet readers who read Oliveira *as* Cortázar in Paris would be mistaken. No, no, I was very different.

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INTERVIEWER

Is this because you don't wish your writing to be autobiographical?

CORTÁZAR

I don't like autobiography. I will never write my memoirs. Autobiographies of others interest me, of course, but not my own. If I wrote my autobiography, I would have to be truthful and honest. I couldn't tell an imaginary autobiography. And so, I would be doing a historian's job, being a self-historian, and that bores me. Because I prefer to invent, to imagine. Of course, very often when I have ideas for a novel or a story, situations and moments of my life naturally place themselves in that context. In my story "Deshoras," the idea of the boy being in love with his pal's older sister is, in fact, based on an autobiographical situation. So there is a small part of it that's autobiographical, but from there on, it's the fantastic or the imaginary which dominates.

INTERVIEWER

How do you start with your stories? By any particular entry, an image?

CORTÁZAR

With me stories and novels can start anywhere. As for the writing itself, when I begin to write, the story has been turning around in me a long time, sometimes for weeks. But not in any way that's clear; it's a sort of general idea of the story. Perhaps that house where there's a red plant in one corner, and I know there's an old man who walks around in this house. That's all I know. It happens like that. And then there are the dreams. During this gestation period my dreams are full of references and allusions to what is going to be in the story. Sometimes the whole story is in a dream. One of my first and most popular stories, "House Taken Over," is a nightmare I had. I got up immediately and wrote it. But in general, what comes out of the dreams are fragments of references. That is, my subconscious

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is in the process of working through a story—when I am dreaming, it's being written inside there. So when I say that I begin anywhere, it's because I don't know what, at that point, is to be the beginning or the end. When I start to write, that's the beginning. I haven't decided that the story has to start like that; it simply starts there and it continues, and very often I have no clear idea about the ending—I don't know what's going to happen. It's only gradually, as the story goes on, that things become clearer and abruptly I see the ending.

INTERVIEWER

So you are discovering the story *while* you are writing it?

CORTÁZAR

That's right. It's like improvising in jazz. You don't ask a jazz musician, "But what are you going to play?" He'll laugh at you. He has a theme, a series of chords he has to respect, and then he takes up his trumpet or his saxophone and he begins. It's not a question of *idea.* He performs through a series of different internal pulsations. Sometimes it comes out well, sometimes it doesn't. It's the same with me. I'm a bit embarrassed to sign my stories sometimes. The novels, no, because the novels I work on a lot; there's a whole architecture. But my stories, it's as if they were dictated to me by something that is in me, but it's not me who's responsible. Well, since it does appear they are mine even so, I guess I should accept them!

INTERVIEWER

Are there certain aspects of writing a story that always pose a problem for you?

CORTÁZAR

In general, no, because as I was explaining, the story is already made somewhere inside me. So, it has its dimension, its structure; if it's going to be a very short story or a fairly long story, all that is as if decided in advance. But in recent years I've started to sense some problems. I reflect more in front of

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the page. I write more slowly. And I write in a way that's more spare. Certain critics have reproached me for that, they've told me that little by little I'm losing that suppleness in my stories. I seem to be saying what I want to with a greater economy of means. I don't know if it's for better or for worse—in any case, it's my way of writing now.

INTERVIEWER

You were saying that with the novels there is a whole architecture. Does that mean that you work very differently?

CORTÁZAR

The first thing I wrote in *Hopscotch* was a chapter that is now in the middle. It's the chapter where the characters put out a plank to cross from one window of an apartment house to another. I wrote that without knowing why I was writing it. I saw the characters, I saw the situation—it was in Buenos Aires. It was very hot, I remember, and I was next to the window with my typewriter. I saw this situation of a guy who's trying to make his wife go across the plank—because he won't go himself—to get some silly thing, some nails. I wrote all that, which was long, some forty pages, and when I'd finished I said to myself, "All right, but what have I done? Because that's not a story. What is it?" Then I understood that I was launched on a novel, but that I couldn't continue from that point. I had to stop there and go back and write the whole section in Paris which comes before, which is the whole background of Oliveira, and when I finally arrived at this chapter about walking the plank, then I went on from there.

INTERVIEWER

Do you revise much when you write?

CORTÁZAR

Very little. That comes from the fact that the thing has already been at work inside me. When I see the rough drafts of certain of my writer friends, where everything is revised, every-

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thing's changed, moved around, and there are arrows all over the place . . . no no no. My manuscripts are very clean.

INTERVIEWER

José Lezama Lima in *Paradiso* has Cemí saying that "the baroque . . . is what has real interest in Spain and Hispanic America." Why do you think that is so?

CORTÁZAR

I cannot reply as an expert. True, the baroque is greatly important in Latin America, both in the arts and in the literature as well. The baroque can offer a great richness; it lets the imagination soar in all its many spiraling directions, as in a baroque church with its decorative angels and all that, or in baroque music. But I distrust the baroque. The baroque writers, very often, let themselves go too easily in their writing. They write in five pages what one could very well write in one. I too must have fallen into the baroque because I am Latin American, but I have always had a mistrust of it. I don't like turgid, voluminous sentences, full of adjectives and descriptions, purring and purring into the reader's ear. I know it's very charming, of course. It's very beautiful but it's not me. I'm more on the side of Jorge Luis Borges. He has always been an enemy of the baroque; he tightened his writing, as if with pliers. Well, I write in a very different way than Borges, but the great lesson he taught me is one of economy. He taught me when I began to read him, being very young, that one had to try to say what one wanted to with economy, but with a beautiful economy. It's the difference, perhaps, between a plant, which would be considered baroque, with its multiplication of leaves, often very beautiful, and a precious stone, a crystal—*that* for me is more beautiful still.

INTERVIEWER

What are your writing habits? Have certain things changed?

CORTÁZAR

The one thing that hasn't changed, and never will, is the total anarchy and the disorder. I have absolutely no method.

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When I feel like writing a story I let everything drop; I write the story. And sometimes when I write a story, in the month or two that follows I will write two or three more. In general, the stories come in series. Writing one leaves me in a receptive state, and then I "catch" another. You see the sort of image I use, but it's like that; the story drops inside of me. But then a year can go by where I write nothing . . . nothing. Of course, these last few years I have spent a good deal of my time at the typewriter writing political articles. The texts I've written about Nicaragua, everything I've written about Argentina, have nothing to do with literature—they're militant things.

INTERVIEWER

You've often said that it was the Cuban revolution that awakened you to questions of Latin America and its problems.

CORTÁZAR

And I say it again.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have preferred places for writing?

CORTÁZAR

In fact, no. In the beginning, when I was younger and physically more resistant, here in Paris for example, I wrote a large part of *Hopscotch* in cafés. Because the noise didn't bother me and, on the contrary, it was a very congenial place. I worked a lot there—I read or I wrote. But with age I've become more complicated. I write when I'm sure of having some silence. I can't write if there's music, that's absolutely out. Music is one thing and writing is another. I need a certain calm; but, having said this, a hotel, an airplane sometimes, a friend's house, or here at home are places where I can write.

INTERVIEWER

What about Paris? What gave you the courage to pick up and move off to Paris when you did, more than thirty years ago?

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CORTÁZAR

Courage? No, it didn't take much courage. I simply had to accept the idea that coming to Paris, and cutting the bridges with Argentina at that time meant being very poor and having problems making a living. But that didn't worry me. I knew in one way or another I was going to manage. I came to Paris primarily because Paris, French culture on the whole, held a strong attraction for me. I had read French literature with a passion in Argentina, so I wanted to be here and get to know the streets and the places one finds in the books, in the novels. To go through the streets of Balzac or of Baudelaire . . . it was a very romantic voyage. I was, I *am*, very romantic. In fact, I have to be rather careful when I write, because very often I could *let myself fall into . . . I wouldn't say bad taste, perhaps not,* but a bit in the direction of an exaggerated romanticism. In my private life, I don't need to control myself. I really am very sentimental, very romantic. I'm a tender person; I have a lot of tenderness to give. What I give now to Nicaragua, it's tenderness. It is also the political conviction that the Sandinistas are right in what they're doing and that they're leading an admirable struggle; but it's not only the political impetus, it's that there's an enormous tenderness because it's a people I love, as I love the Cubans, and I love the Argentines. Well, all that makes up part of my character. In my writing I have had to watch myself, above all when I was young. I wrote things then that were tearjerkers. That was really romanticism, the *roman rose.* My mother would read them and cry.

INTERVIEWER

Nearly all your writing that people know dates from your arrival in Paris. But you were writing a lot before, weren't you? A few things had already been published.

CORTÁZAR

I've been writing since the age of nine, right up through my whole adolescence and early youth. In my early youth I was already capable of writing stories and novels, which showed me

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that I was on the right path. But I wasn't eager to publish. I was very severe with myself, and I continue to be. I remember that my peers, when they had written some poems or a small novel, searched for a publisher right away. I would tell myself, "No, you're not publishing, you hang onto that." I kept certain things, and others I threw out. When I did publish for the first time I was over thirty years old; it was just before my departure for France. That was my first book of stories, *Bestiario*, which came out in '51, the same month that I took the boat to come here. Before that, I had published a little text called *Los Reyes*, which is a dialogue. A friend who had a lot of money, who did small editions for himself and his friends, had done a private edition. And that's all. No, there's another thing—a sin of youth—a book of sonnets. I published it myself, but with a pseudonym.

INTERVIEWER

You are the lyricist of a recent album of tangos, "Trottoirs de Buenos Aires." What got you started writing tangos?

CORTÁZAR

Well, I am a good Argentine and above all a *porteño*—that is, a resident of Buenos Aires, because it's the port. The tango was our music, and I grew up in an atmosphere of tangos. We listened to them on the radio, because the radio started when I was little, and right away it was tango after tango. There were people in my family, my mother and an aunt, who played tangos on the piano and sang them. Through the radio, we began to listen to Carlos Gardel and the great singers of the time. The tango became like a part of my consciousness and it's the music that sends me back to my youth again and to Buenos Aires. So, I'm quite caught up in the tango, all while being very critical, because I'm not one of those Argentines who believes that the tango is the wonder of wonders. I think that the tango on the whole, especially next to jazz, is a very poor music. It is poor but it is beautiful. It's like those plants that are very simple, that one can't compare to an orchid or a rosebush, but which have an extraordinary beauty in themselves. In recent years,

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friends of mine have played tangos here; the Cuarteto Cedrón are great friends, and a fine *bandoneón* player named Juan José Mosalini—so we've listened to tangos, talked about tangos. Then one day a poem came to me like that, which I thought perhaps could be set to music, I didn't really know. And then, looking among unpublished poems (most of my poems are unpublished), I found some short poems which those fellows could set to music, and they did. Also, we've done the opposite as well. Cedrón gave me a musical theme to which I wrote the words. So I've done it both ways.

INTERVIEWER

In the biographical notes in your books, it says you are also an amateur trumpet player. Have you ever played with any groups?

CORTÁZAR

No. That's a bit of a legend that was invented by my very dear friend Paul Blackburn, who died quite young unfortunately. He knew that I played the trumpet a little, mainly for myself at home. So he would always tell me, "But you should meet some musicians to play with." I'd say, "No, as the Americans say, 'I haven't got what it takes.' " I didn't have the talent; I was just playing for myself. I would put on a Jelly Roll Morton record, or Armstrong, or early Ellington—where the melody is easier to follow, especially the blues which has a given scheme. And I would have fun hearing them play and adding my trumpet. I played along with them . . . but it certainly wasn't *with* them! I never dared approach jazz musicians; now my trumpet is lost somewhere in the other room there. Blackburn put that in one of the blurbs. And because there is a photo of me playing the trumpet, people thought I really could play well. As I never wanted to publish before being sure, it was the same with the trumpet—I never wanted to play before being sure. And that day has never arrived.

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INTERVIEWER

Have you worked on any novels since *A Manual for Manuel*?

CORTÁZAR

Alas no, for reasons that are very clear. It's due to political work. For me, a novel requires a concentration and a quantity of time, at least a year, to work tranquilly and not to abandon it. And now, I cannot. A week ago I didn't know I would be leaving for Nicaragua in three days. When I return I won't know what's going to happen next. But this novel is already written. It's there, it's in my dreams. I dream all the time of this novel. I don't know what happens in the novel, but I have an idea. As in the stories, I know it will be something fairly long, with some elements of the fantastic, but not too many. It will be in the genre of *A Manual for Manuel*, where the fantastic elements are mixed in; but it won't be a political book. It will be a book of pure literature. I hope that life will give me a sort of desert island, even if the desert island is this room . . . and a year, I ask for a year. But when these bastards—the Hondurans, the Somocistas and Reagan—are in the act of destroying Nicaragua, I don't have my island. I couldn't begin to write, because I would be obsessed constantly by that problem. It demands top priority.

INTERVIEWER

And it can be difficult enough as it is balancing life and literature.

CORTÁZAR

Yes and no. It depends on the kind of priorities. If the priorities are, like those I just mentioned, touching on the moral responsibility of an individual, I would agree. But I know many people who are always complaining, "Oh, I'd like to write my novel, but I have to sell the house, and then there are the taxes, what am I going to do?" Reasons like, "I work in the office all day, how do you expect me to write?" Me, I worked all day at UNESCO and then I came home and wrote *Hopscotch*. When

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one wants to write, one writes. If one is condemned to write, one writes.

INTERVIEWER

Do you work anymore as a translator or interpreter?

CORTÁZAR

No, that's over. I lead a very simple life. I don't need much money to buy the things I like: records, books, tobacco. So now I can live from my royalties. They've translated me into so many languages that I receive enough money to live on. I have to be a little careful; I can't go out and buy myself a yacht, but since I have absolutely no intention of buying a yacht . . .

INTERVIEWER

Have fame and success been pleasurable?

CORTÁZAR

Ah, listen, I'll say something I shouldn't say because no one will believe it, but success isn't a pleasure for me. I'm glad to be able to live from what I write, so I have to put up with the popular and critical side of success. But I was happier as a man when I was unknown. Much happier. Now I can't go to Latin America or to Spain without being recognized every ten yards, and the autographs, the embraces. . . . It's very moving, because they're readers who are frequently quite young. I'm happy that they like what I do, but it's terribly distressing for me on the level of privacy. I can't go to a beach in Europe; in five minutes there's a photographer. I have a physical appearance that I can't disguise; if I were small I could shave and put on sunglasses, but with my height, my long arms and all that, they discover me from afar. On the other hand, there are very beautiful things: I was in Barcelona a month ago, walking around the gothic quarter one evening, and there was an American girl, very pretty, playing the guitar very well and singing. She was seated on the ground singing to earn her living. She sang a bit like Joan Baez, a very pure, clear voice. There was a group of young people from Barcelona listening. I stopped to listen to her, but I stayed

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in the shadows. At one point, one of these young men who was about twenty, very young, very handsome, approached me. He had a cake in his hand. He said, "Julio, take a piece." So I took a piece and I ate it, and I told him, "Thanks a lot for coming up and giving that to me." He said to me, "But, listen, I give you so little next to what you've given me." I said, "Don't say that, don't say that," and we embraced and he went away. Well, things like that, that's the best recompense for my work as a writer. That a boy or a girl comes up to speak to you and to offer you a piece of cake, it's wonderful. It's worth the trouble of having written.

—Jason Weiss

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Sharona Ben-Tov

Carillon for Cambridge Women

There is a cataract of blood over the dawn;
I know by watching
from the river's fringes of wild grass
as the bridge cables whine, and the bare
nerves of trees wake to hunger, and the wind
invests us with grand estates of loss; there is
blood unrolling like a stair behind that muslin
battered with cloudblow, sure as there's a heart
behind this breast. The grass falls slant
as if its tassels brushed a further limit,
and were dispossessed of common thoughts, of ground.

The factory windows flash and peel, flaking light.
The cold bread of pavement meets the day,
and in their rooms, lovers cry
the double staves of women, smooth cheek by smooth
cheek,
unlonely moons. The solitary ones are already awake.
Elaine pulls on her stockings
by the lightbulb curtained with a handkerchief;
strawberries blot the tablecloth of her framed poster;
last night's chicken bones desiccate in the sink.
Hollow marrow bless this house. She whistles.

In a pale dawn, the bedroom stranded like seaweed . . .
A kiss. Rough blankets, and my stiff clothes
remembered me. Her hall was rigged with gauze.
My shadow slid across the glassed-in photograph
of Frances Johnston, posed for her self-portrait:
one boot crossed on her knee, unlayering petticoats;

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her cigarette propped, pointing; she leans over it
while settling a beer stein on her thigh, as if
to back up a hunch. In her brown tinctured time
her hooded eyes know irony like mine.
My shadow or reflection slipped, dissolved toward the blue door
where early morning beckoned
and first birds turned the key.

As I walked home in the morning,
I saw the river flipping out its pockets full of wind.
Through Harvard's backstreets, crusted with old snow,
the straight brown walls said Forever;
the shuttered bookstores in their sleep murmured Therefore.
I walked down to Central Square.
A red brick steeple housed an iron cage
that exposed a black cluster of bells
locked to the blunt-glint of microphones.
They shouted down to me, dispersing grey birds.
NO WORDS
The sky was fluid then as a melting candle.
Through M.I.T., the quiet labs reporting ON,
past Draper Lab's black mirror walls
no one reflected me. Only the wind lifted a newspaper
in the echo of my steps,
and I thought, who will remember us?

Judith, Nora, Claire, Colleen, Christine,
Sharon, Mary, Laura, Donna, Monica,
Nancy, Jane, Hermine, Beth, Betsy, Robin, Barbara, Joanne,
Ellen, Kathleen, Martha, Alice, Luida,
Dana, Andrea,
Aline, Amelia, Audre, Adrienne,
Bonnie and her daughter Dorian.

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Something is climbing the walls of the laboratories.
Something with long hair and a black sack and a rope.
Her mask is velvet or flannel, her hands are badly burned.
Look for the face with purple flame in its eyelids.
The legislator has squared his scaffold shoulders;
his grey head glitters, his mouth is wrecking the word Baby.
Look for the women with odd knobbed toes, shifting at
the bus stop,
the hanglips, the sucked-in cheeks, the sour wallets,
the mothers whose coats are riddled with cigarette holes,
the baskets threaded with nettles, the ballot stamped No.
NO WORD KNOWS YOU, whistles the saboteur.
Look for drill-holes the snow has covered with urine.
There are telephone wires in the gutters; they appear as
footprints;
the slush is a documentary headed for the river;
vote and taxes, coffee and bones.
This is the district of our waking.
The eviscerated stars have eyes of glass now.
The moon, at dawn, shrugs one white shoulder:
she looks down, world of possibility, on ours.

The horizon of caryatids, carved in distorted heat,
from their pyres support the dome of sunrise.
Their robes flicker at the rim of all clear thinking.
Laura climbs the scaffold at the supermarket mural,
thinking Red.
The wall, painted over, will flip inward
to the horizonless underskin of dreams:
two old winos lying where no winos could fly in banner
color.
She surveys the design that dwarfs her,
and wipes back her curls with corded hands.
Colleen fires glass in a filthy warehouse,
its walls moulting shell-thin calcimine, its floors
unfinished. An echo in the hallway mumbles *long*.
Snow blots the backalley, flakes of light debris, unfinished
sky,

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not yet shutting her out. A clothesline. Wooden pins.
Five flapping towels of transparent glass.
When will the windows sag and glob, big tears?
wonders the seventh daughter of eleven, her mind
a globe suffused with huge clouds,
lost prairies, ghost mountains, broken
suboceanic towns, crumbling
ingots breeding mica in our loam,
bracken, the melting sandbar stripped in unequal
moonlight,
the starry moss, ferns, lilies, cattails, the buried schist
of pink quartz, amethyst, green rime in the wells,
the sundered lintels, the mountains moulded in the shape
of wombs,
the high cleft hills, brushfire of the ancient genitals,
the ashwet marble niches, the broken fountains,
unfounded truths. The match. The candle. Salt.
The wine left till it sours. The ring of milk. The dust.
Home is where we left it, echoing through ourselves
as grass echoes the rippling of the grass.

We say the first birds sing
take heart, *take heart*, *speak*, *speak*.

And one said,
Near Church and Story streets after the rain,
where bruised sacks of cloud drifted,
all over the street, as if a lamp had broken,
ran puddled gold anointing light;
the air was lilac, the brick walls breathed. And one said,
Like leaves choking a fountain, everyone gathered.
A blonde infant rode her father's shoulders; I missed
the speech, she floated so far up. And one said,
We are drawn upward through the falling snow. And one
said,
The dark green maples clotted like stormclouds,
the grass galloped beneath though I lay still,
the sky bored right into my head. And one said,

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Never trust a bank. And one said NO WORDS. And one declared
a double rainbow pealed
distantly over Mandrake Books
like a primer in harmonies.
The singing grass walks in all our flesh.
I know fear kept me back, but joy undid me,
so even the threat of death cannot contain me.
White sails, inspired with sun, tacking out of the harbor,
pinned in the windows of the elevated train
before it rushes under,
who will remember us?
Sparrows string webs of birdsong through the river mist.
The sky is milk, quartz, glass, then amethyst.

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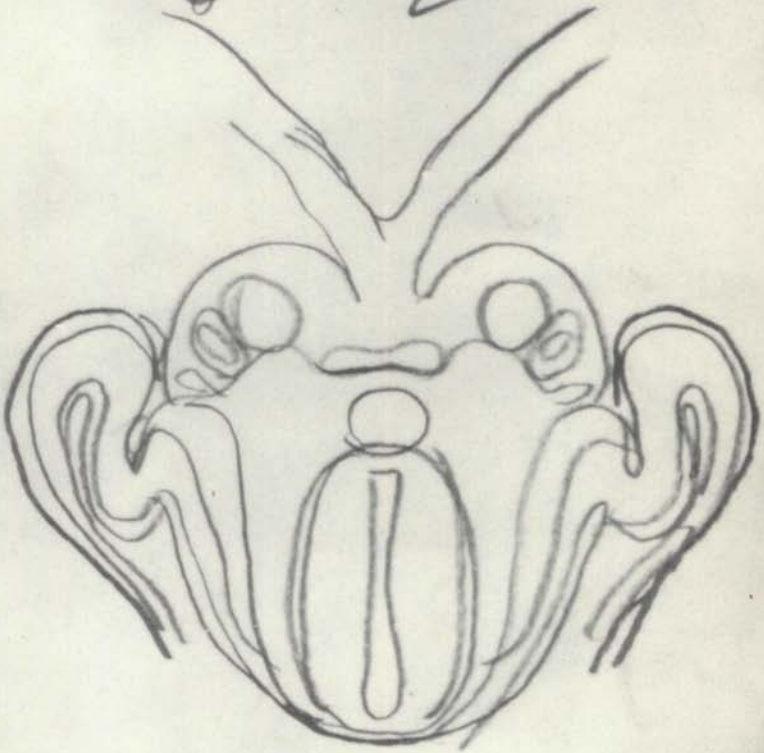
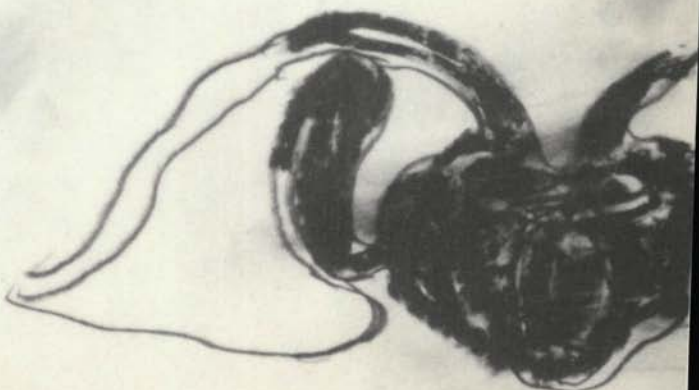
Sirens:

Nine Drawings

Percy Wanless





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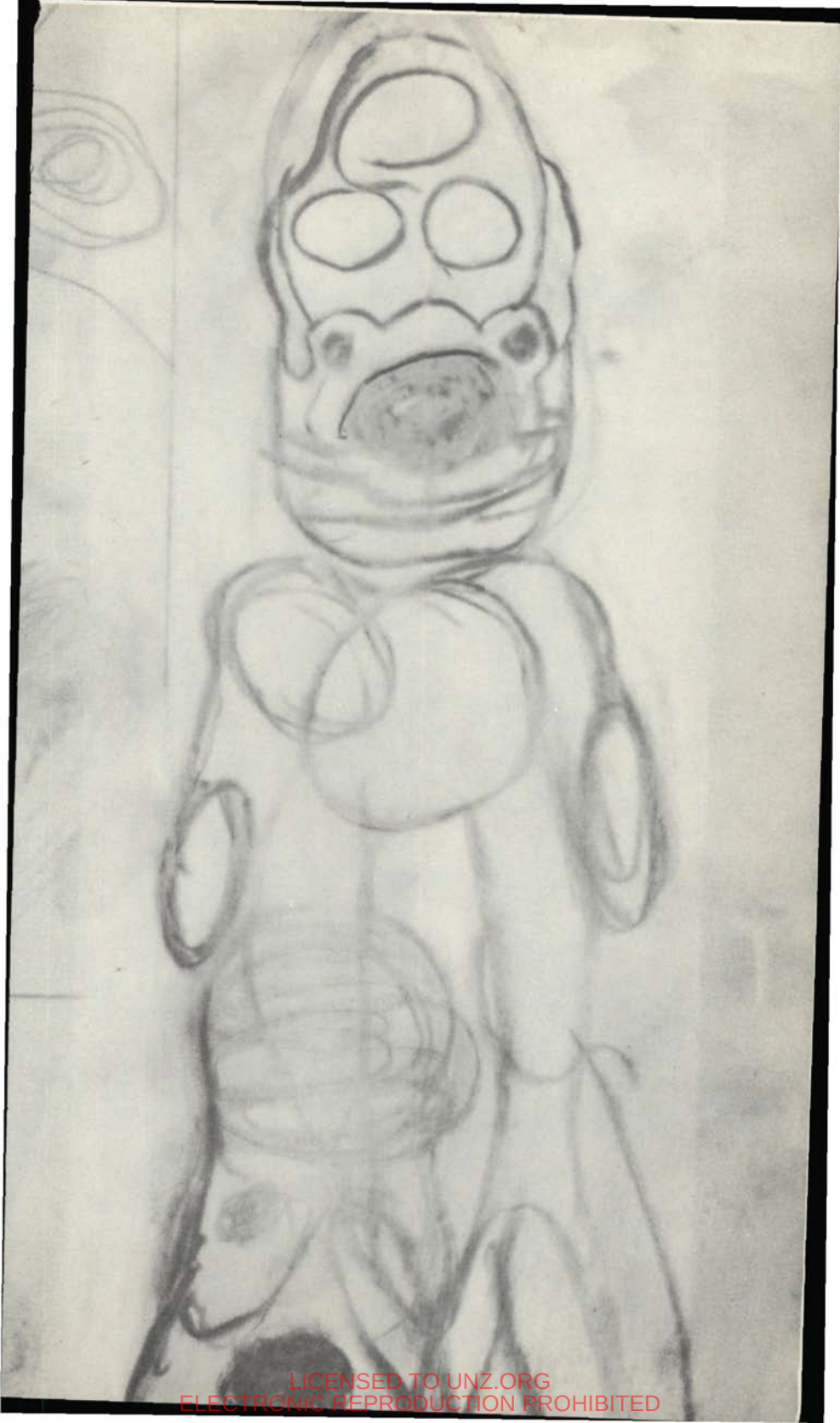

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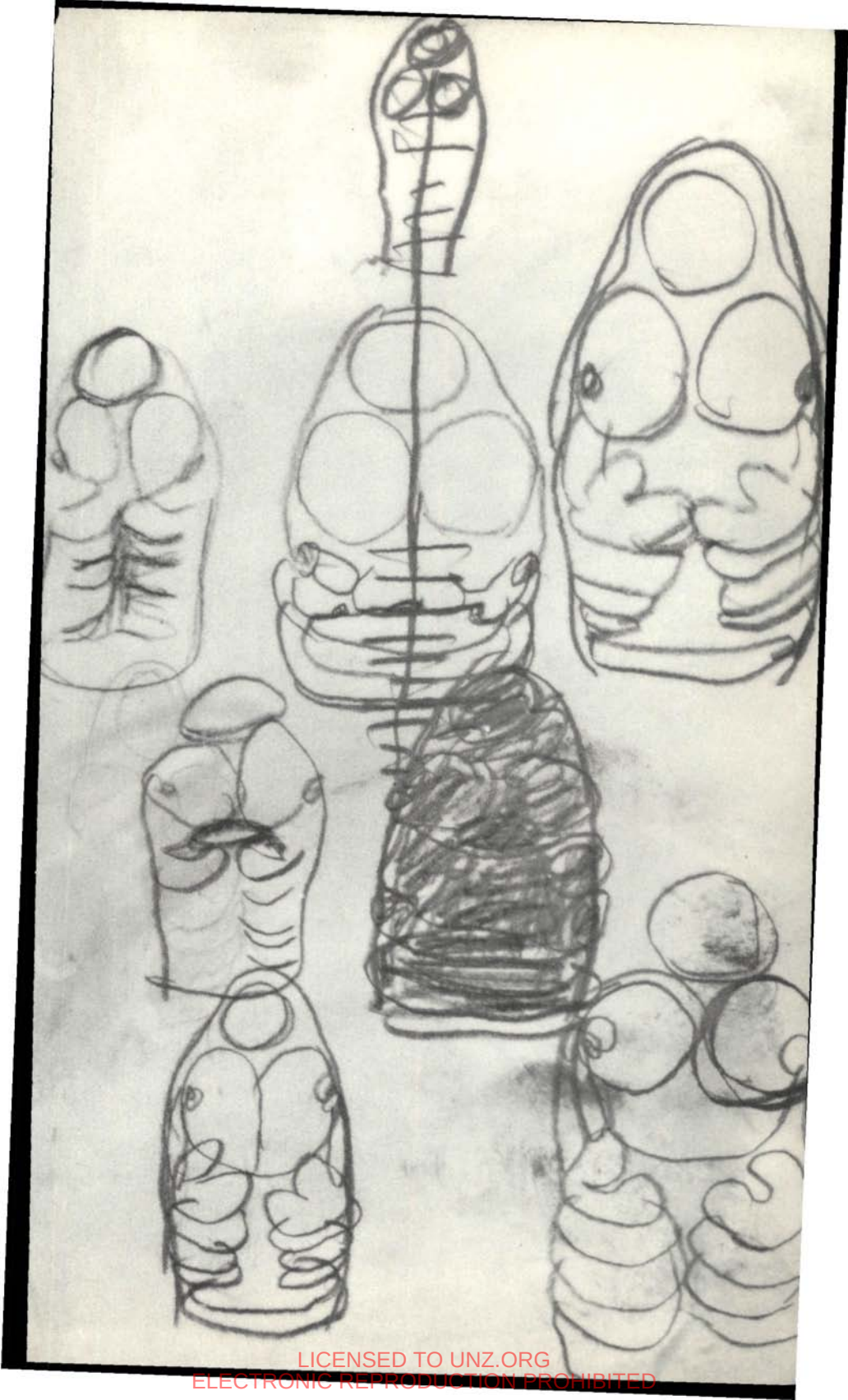

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Harold Brodkey

To Frank O'Hara

The real is a wilderness
that ambition calls a garden.

He was young. Youth is a garden posture
even after a winter's study,
discolored skin
as pored as pumice stone,
voice an arsonist's meteoric
rise—flock of urgent veering geese.
Driven intention in the face of accident,
comic, intelligent.

His pretensions were a form
of art, combustible
like song.

A democracy was in the voice
although you never said,
I bless this life.

I used to blame myself for being young.
Urging on the Irishman's parade, I was embarrassed
when love of a sort
put him in an orphanage.

Sputtering, the arc of talk
burned in the attempt
to be the beginning of art.

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Envied, askew, and gone,
the dead are dishonest theorems
rescued from bleached sections of an afternoon
with the sun's slanted flags
in it.

What happened between us
was that, attentive-hearted, we began to drown,
dry auditors, in meaning.

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Anne Waldman

Canzone

for Ted Berrigan, 1934–1983

I crisscross my feelings with a view
of street, people walking, some crazy looking, from a window
Some could be anyone, me, you, Ted, with your own "view"
Could anyone else share? Tinted clouds today. His view
which some thought extreme, distorted, stubborn,
making friends into Myth where they became viewed
with excessive scrutiny & magnified into situations in which only the Heavens dare intervene
He said, Propiate the gods! They love to intervene
as you walk, sleep, talk, make love, drink soda in plain view
of them. I'll put in a good word, you show-offs! I have long talks
with them at night about you, no evasions when the muses talk
This was the energy Ted sought by talk

As if there was no other way close enough to get a multiple view
of self, and tell some history through layers of talk
He would tell his heart to talk
& it did & enlarged the domains of art, his mind was behind a window
out of which he could throw propriety, then remake language, steal it from books, from fast elegant talk
to discover the power that lives in printed words & talk
is captive, you can reinvent the world, it's not so stubborn

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but tongue-tied, shy, a young girl, gorgeous, funny, also
stubborn
about bringing poems into focus. Huddle, team, to talk
Ted lying before his audience in bed, a practiced man,
his memory then intervene
fundamental to the thing seen, the thing thought, then
Death could intervene

Pugnacious, subversive, president of the adventure,
Death intervened
to taste & magnify the ingredients, but also end talk
although I hear it still go on. Mysterious noises
intervene
to shake the poet out of her sleep to recognize his cargo, &
to intervene
on behalf of Ted who won't ever formulate a neat view
Here is a non-utilitarian cigarette, but it can't intervene
between us anymore, it won't intervene
as you once flicked ash on my lap (I was indignant),
then out the window
Or you once beheld all of Boston from my airplane
window
Did you ever belong to me? Could I never intervene
to make you healthier, less quivering with stubborn
love or pride? I loved you of course for being stubborn

You were inhabiting the same stubborn
poem as I was. I can't look out the window
without missing you without being angry at you,
stubborn
in a kind of grief that won't let me write now, head
stubborn
& the typewriter waiting for a new oracle who will talk
vast magical ruminations spelled out from the moment,
sing of a stubborn
time insistent for war for chatter for stubborn

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stammerings
to make life more exalted, a point of view
which uses dreams because they are my imagination my
view
now of you as a full citizen of this country no matter
how stubborn
I breathe in the colors from the window
I stand in the early morning light of the window

Are you drawn back to look in my window?
If so, I'll be capacious, I want to ask you something
stubborn
"I am a bountiful cotton crop" you wrote on your last
postcard window
like a cartoon. Then my name and address: "Mt. Olympus,
Near Bo-Tree, Manhattan." You draw an octagon window
Your handwriting makes me laugh, it would always
intervene
optimistically. Did you mean to keep me in the picture?
The window
is shut, I went away, a stranger moved into the apartment,
no need to shout up at the window
I *miss your comparisons, prodigious talk*
We are as unalike as people can be in our talk
It is 1967. You call up at the window
with your rotund ambition, a cosmopolitan view
Let's get high, let's fall in love, let's ride uptown & see
what the painters are doing with a view

Is it nothing more than strange antics, a view
I'll never own, nor you, nor greater intensity than talk
will ever do, when grief does spill over & intervene
to the present?
My equilibrium is swaying as the 20th century stubbornly
shuts down
I was there & I was there by the window onto you.

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David Shapiro

House (Blown Apart)

I can see the traces of old work
Embedded in this page, like your bed
Within a bed. My old desire to live!
My new desire to understand material, raw
Material as if you were a house without windows
A red stain. Gold becomes cardboard.
The earth grows rare and cheap as a street.
Higher up a bird of prey affectionate in bright grey
travels without purpose.
I beg you to speak with a recognizable accent
As the roof bashed in for acoustics
Already moans. What is not a model
Is blown to bits in this mature breeze.
If students visit for signs
Or signatures we would discuss traces.
We would examine each other for doubts.
Old work we might parody as an homage
Losing after all the very idea of parody.
Traces of this morning's work are embedded in this
page.

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Frederick Seidel

Elms

It sang without a sound: music that
The naive elm trees loved. They were alive.
Oh silky music no elm tree could survive.
The head low slither of a stalking cat,
Black panther darkness pouring to the kill,
Entered every elm—they drank it in.
Drank silence. Then the silence drank. Wet chin,
Hot, whiskered darkness. Every elm was ill.
What else is there to give but joy? Disease.
And trauma. Lightning, or as slow as lava.
Darkness drinking from a pool in Java,
Black panther drinking from a dream. The trees
Around the edge are elms. Below, above.
Man-eater drinking its reflection: love.

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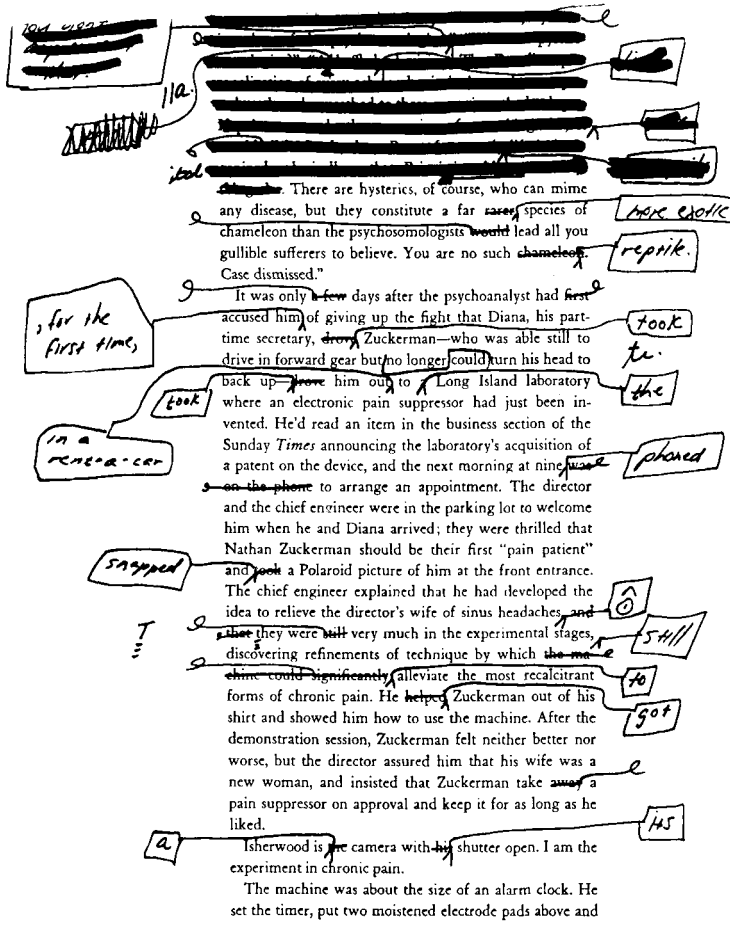

. There are hysterics, of course, who can mime any disease, but they constitute a far ~~rarer~~ species of chameleon than the psychosomologists ~~would~~ lead all you gullible sufferers to believe. You are no such ~~chameleon~~. Case dismissed."

It was only ~~a few~~ days after the psychoanalyst had ~~first~~ accused him of giving up the fight that Diana, his part-time secretary, ~~drove~~ Zuckerman—who was able still to drive in forward gear but no longer could turn his head to back up ~~drove~~ him out to Long Island laboratory where an electronic pain suppressor had just been invented. He'd read an item in the business section of the Sunday *Times* announcing the laboratory's acquisition of a patent on the device, and the next morning at nine ~~on the phone~~ to arrange an appointment. The director and the chief engineer were in the parking lot to welcome him when he and Diana arrived; they were thrilled that Nathan Zuckerman should be their first "pain patient" and ~~took~~ a Polaroid picture of him at the front entrance. The chief engineer explained that he had developed the idea to relieve the director's wife of sinus headaches, ~~and then~~ they were ~~still~~ very much in the experimental stages, discovering refinements of technique by which ~~the machine~~ could ~~significantly~~ alleviate the most recalcitrant forms of chronic pain. He ~~helped~~ Zuckerman out of his shirt and showed him how to use the machine. After the demonstration session, Zuckerman felt neither better nor worse, but the director assured him that his wife was a new woman, and insisted that Zuckerman take ~~away~~ a pain suppressor on approval and keep it for as long as he liked.

Isherwood is ~~the~~ camera with ~~his~~ shutter open. I am the experiment in chronic pain.

The machine was about the size of an alarm clock. He set the timer, put two moistened electrode pads above and

A galley page of The Anatomy Lesson, *with Philip Roth's corrections.*

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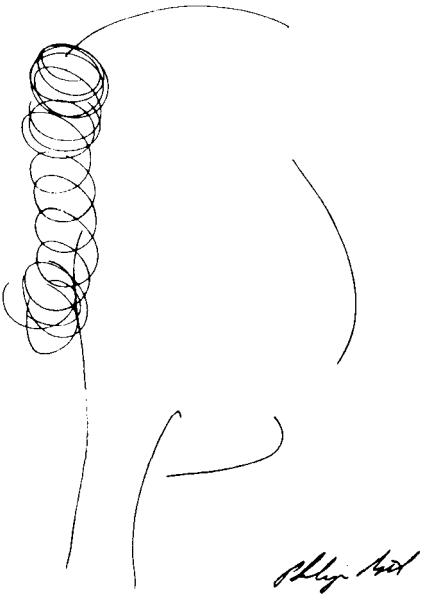

A Philip Roth self-portrait, from Burt Britton's Self Portrait: Book People Picture Themselves *(Random House).*

The Art of Fiction LXXXIV

Philip Roth

I met Philip Roth after I had published a short book about his work for the Methuen Contemporary Writers Series. He read the book and wrote me a generous letter. After our first meeting, he sent me the fourth draft of The Anatomy Lesson *which we later talked about, because, in the final stages of writing a novel, Roth likes to get as much criticism and response as he can from a few interested readers. Just after he finished* The Anatomy Lesson *we began the* Paris Review *interview. We met in the early summer of 1983 at the Royal Automobile Club in Pall Mall, where Roth occasionally takes a room to work in when he's visiting England. The room had*

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been turned into a small, meticulously organized office – IBM golfball typewriter, alphabetical file holders, anglepoise lamps, dictionaries, aspirin, copyholder, felt tip pens for correcting, a radio – with a few books on the mantlepiece, among them the recently published autobiography by Irving Howe, A Margin of Hope, *Erik Erikson's* Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History, *Leonard Woolf's autobiography, David Magarshak's* Chekhov, *John Cheever's* Oh What A Paradise It Seems, *Fordyce's* Behavioural Methods for Chronic Pain and Illness *(useful for Zuckerman), Claire Bloom's autobiography* Limelight and After, *and some* Paris Review *interviews. We talked in this businesslike cell for a day and a half, pausing only for meals. I was looked after with great thoughtfulness. Roth's manner, which matches his appearance – subdued, conventional clothes, gold-rimmed spectacles, the look of a quiet professional American visitor to London, perhaps an academic or a lawyer – is courteous, mild, and responsive. He listens carefully to everything, makes lots of quick jokes, and likes to be amused. Just underneath this benign appearance there is a ferocious concentration and mental rapacity; everything is grist for his mill, no vagueness is tolerated, differences of opinion are pounced on greedily, and nothing that might be useful is let slip. Thinking on his feet, he develops his ideas through a playful use of figurative language – as much as a way of avoiding confessional answers (though he can be very direct) as of interesting himself. The transcripts from this taped conversation were long, absorbing, funny, disorganized, and repetitive. I edited them down to a manageable size and sent my version on to him. Then there was a long pause while he went back to America and* The Anatomy Lesson *was published. Early in 1984, on his next visit to England, we resumed; he revised my version and we talked abut the revision until it acquired its final form. I found this process extremely interesting. The mood of the interview had changed in the six months between his finishing a novel and starting new work; it became more combative and buoyant. And the several drafts in themselves displayed Roth's methods*

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of work: raw chunks of talk were processed into stylish, energetic, concentrated prose, and the return to past thoughts generated new ideas. The result provides an example, as well as an account, of Philip Roth's presentation of himself.

INTERVIEWER

How do you get started on a new book?

PHILIP ROTH

Beginning a book is unpleasant. I'm entirely uncertain about the character and the predicament, and a character in his predicament is what I have to begin with. Worse than not knowing your subject is not knowing how to treat it, because that's finally everything. I type out beginnings and they're awful, more of an unconscious parody of my previous book than the breakaway from it that I want. I need something driving down the center of a book, a magnet to draw everything to it—that's what I look for during the first months of writing something new. I often have to write a hundred pages or more before there's a paragraph that's alive. Okay, I say to myself, that's your beginning, start there; that's the first paragraph of the book. I'll go over the first six months of work and underline in red a paragraph, a sentence, sometimes no more than a phrase, that has some life in it, and then I'll type all these out on one page. Usually it doesn't come to more than one page, but if I'm lucky, that's the start of page one. I look for the liveliness to set the tone. After the awful beginning come the months of freewheeling play, and after the play come the crises, turning against your material and hating the book.

INTERVIEWER

How much of a book is in your mind before you start?

ROTH

What matters most isn't there at all. I don't mean the solutions to problems, I mean the problems themselves. You're looking, as you begin, for what's going to resist you. You're

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looking for trouble. Sometimes in the beginning uncertainty arises not because the writing is difficult, but because it isn't difficult enough. Fluency can be a sign that nothing is happening; fluency can actually be my signal to stop, while being in the dark from sentence to sentence is what convinces me to go on.

INTERVIEWER

Must you have a beginning? Would you ever begin with an ending?

ROTH

For all I know I *am* beginning with the ending. My page one can wind up a year later as page two hundred, if it's still even around.

INTERVIEWER

What happens to those hundred or so pages that you have left over? Do you save them up?

ROTH

I generally prefer never to see them again.

INTERVIEWER

Do you work best at any particular time of the day?

ROTH

I work all day, morning and afternoon, just about every day. If I sit there like that for two or three years, at the end I have a book.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think other writers work such long hours?

ROTH

I don't ask writers about their work habits. I really don't care. Joyce Carol Oates says somewhere that when writers ask each other what time they start working and when they finish and

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how much time they take for lunch, they're actually trying to find out "Is he as crazy as I am?" I don't need that question answered.

INTERVIEWER

Does your reading affect what you write?

ROTH

I read all the time when I'm working, usually at night. It's a way of keeping the circuits open. It's a way of thinking about my *line* of work while getting a little rest from the work at hand. It helps inasmuch as it fuels the overall obsession.

INTERVIEWER

Do you show your work-in-progress to anyone?

ROTH

It's more useful for my mistakes to ripen and burst in their own good time. I give myself all the opposition I need while I'm writing, and praise is meaningless to me when I know something isn't even half finished. Nobody sees what I'm doing until I absolutely can't go any further and might even like to believe that I'm done.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a Roth reader in mind when you write?

ROTH

No. I occasionally have an anti-Roth reader in mind. I think, "How he is going to hate this!" That can be just the encouragement I need.

INTERVIEWER

You spoke of the last phase of writing a novel being a "crisis" in which *you* turn against the material and hate the work. Is there always this crisis, with every book?

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ROTH

Always. Months of looking at the manuscript and saying, "This is wrong—but what's wrong?" I ask myself, "If this book were a dream, it would be a dream of what?" But when I'm asking this I'm also trying to *believe* in what I've written, to forget that it's writing and to say, "This *has* taken place," even if it hasn't. The idea is to perceive your invention as a reality that can be understood as a dream. The idea is to turn flesh and blood into literary characters and literary characters into flesh and blood.

INTERVIEWER

Can you say more about these crises?

ROTH

In *The Ghost Writer* the crisis—one among many—had to do with Zuckerman, Amy Bellette, and Anne Frank. It wasn't easy to see that Amy Bellette *as* Anne Frank was Zuckerman's own creation. Only by working through numerous alternatives did I decide that not only was she his creation, but that she might possibly be her own creation too, a young woman inventing herself *within* Zuckerman's invention. To enrich his fantasy without obfuscation or muddle, to be ambiguous *and* clear—well, that was my writing problem through one whole summer and fall. In *Zuckerman Unbound* the crisis was a result of failing to see that Zuckerman's father shouldn't already be dead when the book begins. I eventually realized that the death should come at the conclusion of the book, allegedly as a consequence of the son's blasphemous best-seller. But, starting off, I'd got the thing back to front, and then I stared at it dumbly for months, seeing nothing. I knew that I wanted the book to veer away from Alvin Pepler—I like to be steamrolling along in one direction and then to spring my surprise—but I couldn't give up the premise of my earliest drafts until I saw that the novel's obsessive concern with assassinations, death threats, funerals, and funeral homes, was leading up to, rather than away from, the death of Zuckerman's father. How you juxtapose the events can tie you up in knots and rearranging the

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sequence can free you suddenly to streak for the finish line. In *The Anatomy Lesson* the discovery I made—having banged the typewriter with my head far too long—was that Zuckerman, in the moment that he takes flight for Chicago to try to become a doctor, should begin to impersonate a pornographer. There had to be willed extremism at either end of the moral spectrum, each of his escape-dreams of self-transformation subverting the meaning and mocking the intention of the other. If he had gone off solely to become a doctor, driven only by that high moral ardor, or, if he had just gone around impersonating a pornographer, spewing only that anarchic and alienating rage, he wouldn't have been my man. He has two dominant modes: his mode of self-abnegation, and his fuck-'em mode. You want a bad Jewish boy, that's what you're going to get. He rests from one by taking up the other; though, as we see, it's not much of a rest. The thing about Zuckerman that interests me is that everybody's split, but few so openly as this. Everybody is full of cracks and fissures, but usually we see people trying very hard to hide the places where they're split. Most people desperately want to heal their lesions, and keep trying to. Hiding them is sometimes taken for healing them (or for not having them). But Zuckerman can't successfully do either, and by the end of the trilogy has proved it even to himself. What's determined his life and his work are the lines of fracture in what is by no means a clean break. I was interested in following those lines.

INTERVIEWER

What happens to Philip Roth when he turns into Nathan Zuckerman?

ROTH

Nathan Zuckerman is an act. It's all the art of impersonation, isn't it? That's the fundamental novelistic gift. Zuckerman is a writer who wants to be a doctor impersonating a pornographer. I am a writer writing a book impersonating a writer who wants to be a doctor impersonating a pornographer—who then, to compound the impersonation, to barb the edge, pre-

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tends he's a well-known literary critic. Making fake biography, false history, concocting a half-imaginary existence out of the actual drama of my life *is* my life. There has to be some pleasure in this job, and that's it. To go around in disguise. To act a character. To pass oneself off as what one is not. To *pretend.* The sly and cunning masquerade. Think of the ventriloquist. He speaks so that his voice appears to proceed from someone at a distance from himself. But if he weren't in your line of vision you'd get no pleasure from his art at all. His art consists of being present *and* absent; he's most himself by simultaneously being someone else, neither of whom he "is" once the curtain is down. You don't necessarily, as a writer, have to abandon your biography completely to engage in an act of impersonation. It may be more intriguing when you don't. You distort it, caricature it, parody it, you torture and subvert it, you exploit it—all to give the biography that dimension that will excite your verbal life. Millions of people do this all the time, of course, and not with the justification of making literature. They *mean* it. It's amazing what lies people can sustain behind the mask of their real faces. Think of the art of the adulterer: under tremendous pressure and against enormous odds, ordinary husbands and wives, who would freeze with self-consciousness up on a stage, yet in the theater of the home, alone before the audience of the betrayed spouse, they act out roles of innocence and fidelity with flawless dramatic skill. Great, great performances, conceived with genius down to the smallest particulars, impeccably meticulous naturalistic acting, and all done by rank amateurs. People beautifully pretending to be "themselves." Make-believe can take the subtlest forms, you know. Why should a novelist, a pretender by profession, be any less deft or more reliable than a stolid, unimaginative suburban accountant cheating on his wife? Jack Benny used to pretend to be a miser, remember? Called himself by his own good name and claimed that he was stingy and mean. It excited his comic imagination to do this. He probably wasn't all that funny as just another nice fellow writing checks to the UJA and taking his friends out to dinner. Céline pretended to be a rather indifferent, even irresponsible physician, when he seems in fact

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to have worked hard at his practice and to have been conscientious about his patients. But that wasn't interesting.

INTERVIEWER

But it is. Being a good doctor is interesting.

ROTH

For William Carlos Williams maybe, but not for Céline. Being a devoted husband, an intelligent father, and a dedicated family physician in Rutherford, New Jersey, might have seemed as admirable to Céline as it does to you, or to me for that matter, but *his* writing drew its vigor from the demotic voice and the dramatization of his outlaw side (which was considerable), and so he created the Céline of the great novels in somewhat the way Jack Benny, also flirting with the taboo, created himself as a miser. You have to be awfully naive not to understand that a writer is a performer who puts on the act he does best—not least when he dons the mask of the first person singular. That may be the best mask of all for a second self. Some (many) pretend to be more lovable than they are and some pretend to be less. Beside the point. Literature isn't a moral beauty contest. Its power arises from the authority and audacity with which the impersonation is pulled off; the belief it inspires is what counts. The question to ask about the writer isn't "Why does he behave so badly?" but "What does he gain by wearing this mask?" I don't admire the Genet that Genet presents as himself anymore than I admire the unsavory Molloy impersonated by Beckett. I admire Genet because he writes books that won't let me forget who that Genet is. When Rebecca West was writing about Augustine, she said that his *Confessions* was too subjectively true to be objectively true. I think this is so in the first person novels of Genet and Céline, as it is in Colette, books like *The Shackle* and *The Vagabond.* Gombrowicz has a novel called *Pornographia* in which he introduces himself as a character, using his own name—the better to implicate himself in certain highly dubious proceedings and bring the moral terror to life. Konwicki, another Pole, in his last two novels,

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The Polish Complex and *A Minor Apocalypse*, works to close the gap between the reader and the narrative by introducing "Konwicki" as the central character. He strengthens the illusion that the novel is true—and not to be discounted as "fiction"—by impersonating himself. It all goes back to Jack Benny. Need I add, however, that it's hardly a disinterested undertaking? Writing for me isn't a natural thing that I just keep doing, the way fish swim and birds fly. It's something that's done under a certain kind of provocation, a particular urgency. It's the transformation, through an elaborate impersonation, of a personal emergency into a public act (in both senses of that word). It can be a very trying spiritual exercise to siphon through your being qualities that are alien to your moral make-up—as trying for the writer as for the reader. You can wind up feeling more like a sword-swallower than a ventriloquist or impersonator. You sometimes use yourself very harshly in order to reach what is, literally speaking, beyond you. The impersonator can't afford to indulge the ordinary human instincts which direct people in what they want to present and what they want to hide.

INTERVIEWER

If the novelist is an impersonator, then what about the autobiography? What is the relationship, for example, between the deaths of the parents, which are so important in the last two Zuckerman novels, and the death of your own parents?

ROTH

Why not ask about the relationship between the death of my parents and the death of Gabe Wallach's mother, the germinating incident in my 1962 novel, *Letting Go*? Or ask about the death and funeral of the father, which is at the heart of "The Day It Snowed," my first published story in the *Chicago Review* in 1955? Or ask about the death of Kepesh's mother, wife of the owner of a Catskill hotel, which is the turning point in *The Professor of Desire*? The terrible blow of the death of a parent is something I began writing about long before any parent of mine had died. Novelists are frequently as interested

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in what hasn't happened to them as in what has. What may be taken by the innocent for naked autobiography is, as I've been suggesting, more than likely mock-autobiography or hypothetical autobiography or autobiography grandiosely enlarged. We know about the people who walk into the police station and confess to crimes they haven't committed. Well, the false confession appeals to writers, too. Novelists are even interested in what happens to other people and, like liars and con men everywhere, will pretend that something dramatic or awful or hair-raising or splendid that happened to someone else actually happened to them. The physical particulars and moral circumstances of Zuckerman's mother's death have practically nothing to do with the death of my own mother. The death of the mother of one of my dearest friends—whose account of her suffering stuck in my mind long after he'd told me about it—furnished the most telling details for the mother's death in *The Anatomy Lesson*. The black cleaning woman who commiserates with Zuckerman in Miami Beach about his mother's death is modeled on the housekeeper of old friends in Philadelphia, a woman I haven't seen for ten years and who never laid eyes on anybody in my family but me. I was always entranced by her tangy style of speech, and when the right moment came, I used it. But the words in her mouth I invented. Olivia, the eighty-three-year-old black Florida cleaning woman, *c'est moi*.

As you well know, the intriguing biographical issue—and critical issue, for that matter—isn't that a writer will write about some of what has happened to him, but *how* he writes about it, which, when understood properly, takes us a long way to understanding *why* he writes about it. A more intriguing question is why and how he writes about what hasn't happened—how he feeds what's hypothetical or imagined into what's inspired and controlled by recollection, and how what's recollected spawns the overall fantasy. I suggest, by the way, that the best person to ask about the autobiographical relevance of the climactic death of the father in *Zuckerman Unbound* is my own father, who lives in Elizabeth, New Jersey. I'll give you his phone number.

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INTERVIEWER

Then what is the relationship between your experience of psychoanalysis and the use of psychoanalysis as a literary strategem?

ROTH

If I hadn't been analyzed I wouldn't have written *Portnoy's Complaint* as I wrote it, or *My Life as a Man* as I wrote it, nor would *The Breast* resemble itself. Nor would I resemble myself. The experience of psychoanalysis was probably more useful to me as a writer than as a neurotic, although there may be a false distinction there. It's an experience that I shared with tens of thousands of baffled people, and anything that powerful in the private domain that joins a writer to his generation, to his class, to his moment, is tremendously important for him, providing that afterwards he can separate himself enough to examine the experience objectively, imaginatively, in the writing clinic. You have to be able to become your doctor's doctor, even if only to write about patienthood, which was, certainly in part, a subject in *My Life as a Man*. Why patienthood interested me—and as far back as *Letting Go*, written four or five years before my own analysis—was because so many enlightened contemporaries had come to accept the view of themselves as patients, and the ideas of psychic disease, cure, and recovery. You're asking me about the relationship between art and life? It's like the relationship between the eight hundred or so hours that it took to be psychoanalyzed, and the eight or so hours that it would take to read *Portnoy's Complaint* aloud. Life is long and art is shorter.

INTERVIEWER

Can you talk about your marriage?

ROTH

It took place so long ago that I no longer trust my memory of it. The problem is complicated further by *My Life as a Man*, which diverges so dramatically in so many places from its origin in my own nasty situation that I'm hard put, some twenty-five years later, to sort out the invention of 1975 from the facts of

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1959. You might as well ask the author of *The Naked and the Dead* what happened to him in the Philippines. I can only tell you that that was my time as an infantryman, and that *My Life as a Man* is the war novel I wrote some years after failing to receive the Distinguished Service Cross.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have painful feelings on looking back?

ROTH

Looking back I see these as fascinating years—as people of fifty often do contemplating the youthful adventure for which they paid with a decade of their lives a comfortingly long time ago. I was more aggressive then than I am today, some people were even said to be intimidated by me, but I was an easy target, all the same. We're easy targets at twenty-five, if only someone discovers the enormous bullseye.

INTERVIEWER

And where was it?

ROTH

Oh, where it can usually be found in self-confessed budding literary geniuses. My idealism. My romanticism. My passion to capitalize the L in life. I wanted something difficult and dangerous to happen to me. I wanted a hard time. Well, I got it. I'd come from a small, safe, relatively happy provincial background—my Newark neighborhood in the thirties and forties was just a Jewish Terre Haute—and I'd absorbed, along with the ambition and drive, the fears and phobias of my generation of American Jewish children. In my early twenties, I wanted to prove to myself that I wasn't afraid of all those things. It wasn't a mistake to want to prove that, even though, after the ball was over, I was virtually unable to write for three or four years. From 1962 to 1967 is the longest I've gone, since becoming a writer, without publishing a book. Alimony and recurrent court costs had bled me of every penny I could earn by teaching and writing, and, hardly into my thirties, I was thousands of

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dollars in debt to my friend and editor, Joe Fox. The loan was to help pay for my analysis, which I needed primarily to prevent me from going out and committing murder because of the alimony and court costs incurred for having served two years in a childless marriage. The image that teased me during those years was of a train that had been shunted onto the wrong track. In my early twenties, I had been zipping right along there, you know—on schedule, express stops only, final destination clearly in mind; and then suddenly I was on the wrong track, speeding off into the wilds. I'd ask myself, "How the hell do you get this thing back on the right track?" Well, you can't. I've continued to be surprised, over the years, whenever I discover myself, late at night, pulling into the wrong station.

INTERVIEWER

But not getting back on the same track was a great thing for you, presumably.

ROTH

John Berryman said that for a writer any ordeal that doesn't kill him is terrific. The fact that his ordeal did finally kill him doesn't make what he was saying wrong.

INTERVIEWER

What do you feel about feminism, particularly the feminist attack on you?

ROTH

What is it?

INTERVIEWER

The force of the attack would be, in part, that the female characters are unsympathetically treated, for instance that Lucy Nelson in *When She Was Good* is hostilely presented.

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ROTH

Don't elevate that by calling it a "feminist" attack. That's just stupid reading. Lucy Nelson is a furious adolescent who wants a decent life. She is presented as better than her world and conscious of being better. She is confronted and opposed by men who typify deeply irritating types to many women. She is the protector of a passive, defenseless mother whose vulnerability drives her crazy. She happens to be raging against aspects of middle-class American life that the new militant feminism was to identify as the enemy only a few years after Lucy's appearance in print—hers might even be thought of as a case of premature feminist rage. *When She Was Good* deals with Lucy's struggle to free herself from the terrible disappointment engendered in a daughter by an irresponsible father. It deals with her hatred of the father he was and her yearning for the father he couldn't be. It would be sheer idiocy, particularly if this *were* a feminist attack, to contend that such powerful feelings of loss and contempt and shame do not exist in the daughters of drunks, cowards, and criminals. There is also the helpless Mama's boy Lucy marries, and her hatred of his incompetence and professional innocence. Is there no such thing in the world as marital hatred? That will come as news to all the rich divorce lawyers, not to mention to Thomas Hardy and Gustave Flaubert. By the way, is Lucy's father treated "hostilely" because he's a drunk and a petty thief who ends up in jail? Is Lucy's husband treated "hostilely" because he happens to be a big baby? Is the uncle who tries to destroy Lucy "hostilely" treated because he's a brute? This is a novel about a wounded daughter who has more than sufficient cause to be enraged with the men in her life. She is only "hostilely" presented if it's an act of hostility to recognize that young women can be wounded and young women can be enraged. I'd bet there are even some enraged and wounded women who are feminists. You know, the dirty little secret is no longer sex; the dirty little secret is hatred and rage. It's the tirade that's taboo. Odd that this should be so a hundred years after Dostoyevsky (and fifty after Freud), but nobody nice likes to be identified with the stuff. It's the way folks

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used to feel about fellatio in the good old days. "Me? Never heard of it. Disgusting." But is it "hostile," really, to take a look at the ferocity of the emotion they call "hostility"? *When She Was Good* is not serving the cause—that's true. The anger of this young woman isn't presented to be endorsed with a hearty "Right on!" that will move the populace to action. The nature of the anger is examined, as is the depth of the wound. So are the consequences of the anger, for Lucy as for everyone. I hate to have to be the one to say it, but the portrait isn't without its poignancy. I don't mean by poignancy what the compassionate book reviewers call "compassion." I mean you see the suffering that real rage is.

INTERVIEWER

But supposing I say to you that nearly all the women in the books are there to obstruct, or to help, or to console the male characters. There's the woman who cooks and consoles and is sane and calming, or the other kind of woman, the dangerous maniac, the obstructor. They occur as means of helping or obstructing Kepesh or Zuckerman or Tarnopol. And that could be seen as a limited view of women.

ROTH

Let's face it, some women who are sane also happen to know how to cook. So do some of the dangerous maniacs. Let's leave out the sin of cooking. A great book on the order of *Oblomov* could be written about a man allying himself with woman after woman who gorge him with marvelous meals, but I haven't written it. If your description of the "sane," "calm," and "consoling" woman applies to anyone, it's to Claire Ovington in *The Professor of Desire*, with whom Kepesh establishes a tender liaison some years after the breakup of his marriage. Now, I'd have no objection to your writing a novel about this relationship from the point of view of Claire Ovington—I'd be intrigued to see how she saw it—so why do you take a slightly critical tone about my writing the novel from the point of view of David Kepesh?

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INTERVIEWER

There's nothing wrong with the novel's being written from David Kepesh's point of view. What might cause difficulties for some readers is that Claire, and the other women in the novel, are there to help or hinder him.

ROTH

I'm not pretending to give you anything other than his sense of his life with this young woman. My book doesn't stand or fall on the fact that Claire Ovington is calm and sane, but on whether I am able to depict what calmness and sanity are like, and what it is to have a mate—and why it is one would want a mate—who possesses those and other virtues in abundance. She is also vulnerable to jealousy when Kepesh's ex-wife turns up uninvited, and she carries with her a certain sadness about her family background. She isn't there "as a means" of helping Kepesh. She *helps* him—and he helps her. *They are in love.* She is there because Kepesh has fallen in love with a sane and calm and consoling woman after having been unhappily married to a difficult and exciting woman he was unable to handle. Don't people do that? Someone more doctrinaire than you might tell me that the state of being in love, particularly of being passionately in love, is no basis for establishing permanent relationships between men and women. But, alas, people, even people of intelligence and experience, *will* do it—have done it and seem intent on going on doing it—and I am not interested in writing about what people *should* do for the good of the human race and pretending that's what they *do* do, but writing about what they do indeed do, lacking the programmatic efficiency of the infallible theorists. The irony of Kepesh's situation is that having found the calm and consoling woman he can live with, a woman of *numerous* qualities, he then finds his desire for her perversely seeping away, and realizes that unless this involuntary diminution of passion can be arrested, he'll become alienated from the best thing in his life. Doesn't that happen either? From what I hear this damn seeping away of desire happens all the time and is extremely distressing to the

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people involved. Look, I didn't invent the loss of desire, and I didn't invent the lure of passion, and I didn't invent sane companions, and I didn't invent maniacs. I'm sorry if my men don't have the correct feelings about women, or the universal range of feelings about women, or the feelings about women that it will be okay for men to have in 1995, but I do insist that there is some morsel of truth in my depiction of what it might be like for a man to be a Kepesh, or a Portnoy, or a breast.

INTERVIEWER

Why have you never re-used the character of Portnoy in another book, the way that you have used Kepesh and Zuckerman?

ROTH

But I did use Portnoy in another book. *Our Gang* and *The Great American Novel* are Portnoy in another book. Portnoy wasn't a character for me, he was an explosion, and I wasn't finished exploding after *Portnoy's Complaint*. The first thing I wrote after *Portnoy's Complaint* was a long story that appeared in Ted Solotaroff's *American Review* called "On the Air." John Updike was here a while ago and while we were all having dinner one night, he said, "How come you've never reprinted that story?" I said, "It's too disgusting." John laughed. He said, "It is, it's a truly disgusting story." And I said, "I didn't know what I was thinking about when I wrote it." And that is true to some degree—I didn't want to know; the idea was *not* to know. But I also did know. I looked in the arsenal and found another dynamite stick, and I thought, "Light the fuse and see what happens." I was trying to blow up more of myself. This phenomenon is known to students of literary survey courses as the writer changing his style. I was blowing up a lot of old loyalties and inhibitions, literary as well as personal. I think this may be why so many Jews were incensed by *Portnoy's Complaint*. It wasn't that they'd never heard about kids masturbating before, or about Jewish family fighting. It was, rather, that if they couldn't even control someone like me anymore, with all my respectable affiliations and credentials, all my Seriousness

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of Purpose, something had gone wrong. After all, I wasn't Abbie Hoffman or Lenny Bruce, I was a university teacher who had published in *Commentary*. But at the time it seemed to me that the next thing to be serious about was not being so God damn serious. As Zuckerman reminds Appel, "Seriousness can be as stupid as anything else."

INTERVIEWER

Weren't you also looking for a fight, writing *Portnoy's Complaint*?

ROTH

I'd found a fight without looking for it long before that. They'd never really got off my ass for publishing *Goodbye, Columbus*, which was considered in some circles to be my *Mein Kampf*. Unlike Alexander Portnoy, my education in petit bourgeois morality didn't come at home, but after I'd left home and begun to publish my first short stories. My own household environment as a youngster was much closer to Zuckerman's than to Portnoy's. It had its constraints, but there was nothing resembling the censorious small-mindedness and shame-ridden xenophobia that I ran into from the official Jews who wanted me to shut up. The moral atmosphere of the Portnoy household, in its repressive aspects, owes a lot to the response of persistent voices within the official Jewish community to my auspicious debut. They did much to help make it seem auspicious.

INTERVIEWER

You've been talking about the opposition to *Portnoy's Complaint*. What about the recognition—how did its enormous success affect you?

ROTH

It was too big, on a larger and much crazier scale than I could begin to deal with, so I took off. A few weeks after publication, I boarded a bus at the Port Authority terminal for Saratoga Springs, and holed up at Yaddo, the writers' colony, for three

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months. Precisely what Zuckerman should have done after *Carnovsky*—but he hung around, the fool, and look what happened to him. He would have enjoyed Yaddo more than he enjoyed Alvin Pepler. But it made *Zuckerman Unbound* funnier keeping him in Manhattan, and it made my own life easier, not being there.

INTERVIEWER

Do you dislike New York?

ROTH

I lived there from 1962 until I moved to the country after *Portnoy's Complaint*, and I wouldn't trade those years for anything. New York *gave* me *Portnoy's Complaint* in a way. When I was living and teaching in Iowa City and Princeton, I didn't ever feel so free as I did in New York, in the sixties, to indulge myself in comic performance, on paper and with friends. There were raucous evenings with my New York friends, there was uncensored shamelessness in my psychoanalytic sessions, there was the dramatic, stagey atmosphere of the city itself in the years after Kennedy's assassination—all this inspired me to try out a new voice, a fourth voice, a less page-bound voice than the voice of *Goodbye, Columbus*, or of *Letting Go*, or of *When She Was Good*. So did the opposition to the war in Viet Nam. There's always something behind a book to which it has no seeming connection, something invisible to the reader which has helped to release the writer's initial impulse. I'm thinking about the rage and rebelliousness that were in the air, the vivid examples I saw around me of angry defiance and hysterical opposition. This gave me a few ideas for my act.

INTERVIEWER

Did you feel you were part of what was going on in the sixties?

ROTH

I felt the power of the life around me. I believed myself to be feeling the full consciousness of a place—this time New

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York—for the first time really since childhood. I was also, like others, receiving a stunning education in moral, political, and cultural possibilities from the country's eventful public life and from what was happening in Viet Nam.

INTERVIEWER

But you published a famous essay in *Commentary* in 1960 called "Writing American Fiction" about the way that intellectuals or thinking people in America felt that they were living in a foreign country, a country in whose communal life they were *not* involved.

ROTH

Well, that's the difference between 1960 and 1968. (Being published in *Commentary* is another difference.) Alienated in America, a stranger to its pleasures and preoccupations—that was how many young people like me saw their situation in the fifties. It was a perfectly honorable stance, I think, shaped by our literary aspirations and modernist enthusiasms, the high-minded of the second post-immigrant generation coming into conflict with the first great eruption of postwar media garbage. Little did we know that some twenty years later the philistine ignorance on which we would have liked to turn our backs would infect the country like Camus's plague. Any satirist writing a futuristic novel who had imagined a President Reagan during the Eisenhower years would have been accused of perpetrating a piece of crude, contemptible, adolescent, anti-American wickedness, when, in fact, he would have succeeded, as prophetic sentry, just where Orwell failed; he would have seen that the grotesquery to be visited upon the English-speaking world would not be an extension of the repressive Eastern totalitarian nightmare but a proliferation of the Western farce of media stupidity and cynical commercialism—American-style philistinism run amok. It wasn't Big Brother who'd be watching us from the screen, but we who'd be watching a terrifyingly powerful world leader with the soul of an amiable, soap opera grandmother, the values of a civic-minded Beverly Hills Cadillac dealer, and

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the historical background and intellectual equipment of a high school senior in a June Allyson musical.

INTERVIEWER

What happened to you later, in the seventies? Did what was happening in the country continue to mean much to someone like you?

ROTH

I have to remember what book I was writing and then I can remember what happened to me—though what was happening to me was largely the book I was writing. Nixon came and went in '73, and while Nixon was coming and going I was being driven quite crazy by *My Life as a Man*. In a way I had been writing that book on and off since 1964. I kept looking for a setting for the sordid scene in which Maureen buys a urine specimen from a poor pregnant black woman in order to get Tarnopol to think he's impregnated her. I thought of it first as a scene for *When She Was Good*, but it was all wrong for Lucy and Roy in Liberty Center. Then I thought it might go into *Portnoy's Complaint*, but it was too malevolent for that kind of comedy. Then I wrote cartons and cartons of drafts of what eventually turned out to be *My Life as a Man*—eventually, after I finally realized that my solution lay in the very problem I couldn't overcome: my inability to find the setting appropriate to the sordid event, rather than the sordid event itself, was really at the heart of the novel. Watergate made life interesting when I wasn't writing, but from nine to five every day I didn't think too much about Nixon or about Viet Nam. I was trying to solve the problem of this book. When it seemed I never would, I stopped and wrote *Our Gang*; when I tried again and still couldn't write it, I stopped and wrote the baseball book; then while finishing the baseball book, I stopped to write *The Breast*. It was as though I were blasting my way through a tunnel to reach the novel that I couldn't write. Each of one's books *is* a blast, clearing the way for what's next. It's all one book you

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write anyway. At night you dream six dreams. But *are* they six dreams? One dream prefigures or anticipates the next, or somehow concludes what hasn't yet even been fully dreamed. Then comes the next dream, the corrective of the dream before—the alternative dream, the antidote dream—enlarging upon it, or laughing at it, or contradicting it, or trying just to get the dream dreamed *right*. You can go on trying all night long.

INTERVIEWER

After *Portnoy*, after leaving New York, you moved to the country. What about rural life? Obviously it was used as material in *The Ghost Writer*.

ROTH

I might never have become interested in writing about a reclusive writer if I hadn't first had my own small taste of E.I. Lonoff's thirty-five years of rural splendor. I need something solid under my feet to kick off my imagination. But aside from giving me a sense of the Lonoffs' lives, the country existence hasn't offered anything as yet in the way of subject. Probably it never will and I should get the hell out. Only I happen to love living there, and I can't make *every* choice conform to the needs of my work.

INTERVIEWER

What about England, where you spend part of each year? Is that a possible source of fiction?

ROTH

Ask me twenty years from now. That's about how long it took Isaac Singer to get enough of Poland out of his system—and to let enough of America in—to begin, little by little, as a writer, to see and depict his upper Broadway cafeterias. If you don't know the fantasy life of a country, it's hard to write fiction about it that isn't just description of the decor, human and otherwise. Little things trickle through when I see the country dreaming out loud—in the theater, at an election, during the

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Falklands crisis, but I know nothing really about what means what to people here. It's very hard for me to understand who people are, even when they tell me, and I don't even know if that's *because* of who they are or because of me. I don't know who is impersonating what, if I'm necessarily seeing the real thing or just a fabrication, nor can I easily see where the two overlap. My perceptions are clouded by the fact that I speak the language. I believe I know what's being said, you see, even if I don't. Worst of all, I don't hate anything here. What a relief it is to have no culture-grievances, not to have to hear the sound of one's voice taking positions and having opinions and recounting all that's wrong! What bliss—but for the writing that's no asset. Nothing drives me crazy here, and a writer *has* to be driven crazy to help him to *see*. A writer needs his poisons. The antidote to his poisons is often a book. Now if I *had* to live here, if for some reason I were forbidden ever to return to America, if my position and my personal well-being were suddenly to become permanently bound up with England, well, what was maddening and meaningful might begin to come into focus, and yes, in about the year 2005, maybe 2010, little by little I'd stop writing about Newark and I would dare to set a story at a table in a wine bar on Kensington Park Road. A story about an elderly exiled foreign writer, in this instance reading not the *Jewish Daily Forward*, but the *Herald Tribune*.

INTERVIEWER

In these last three books, the Zuckerman novels, there has been a reiteration of the struggle with Jewishness and Jewish criticism. Why do you think these books go over the past as much as they do? Why is that happening now?

ROTH

In the early seventies, I began to be a regular visitor to Czechoslovakia. I went to Prague every spring and took a little crash course in political repression. I'd only known repression firsthand in somewhat more benign and covert forms—as psychosexual constraint or as social restriction. I knew less about

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anti-Semitic repression from personal experience than I did about the repressions Jews practiced upon themselves, and upon one another, as a consequence of the history of anti-Semitism. Portnoy, you remember, considers himself just such a practicing Jew. Anyway, I became highly attuned to the differences between the writer's life in totalitarian Prague and in freewheeling New York, and I decided, after some initial uncertainty, to focus on the unreckoned consequences of a life in art in the world that I knew best. I realized that there were already many wonderful and famous stories and novels by Henry James and Thomas Mann and James Joyce about the life of the artist, but none I knew of about the comedy that an artistic vocation can turn out to be in the U.S.A. When Thomas Wolfe tackled the subject he was rather rhapsodic. Zuckerman's struggle with Jewishness and Jewish criticism is seen in the context of his comical career as an American writer, ousted by his family, alienated from his fans, and finally at odds with his own nerve endings. The Jewish quality of books like mine doesn't really reside in their subject matter. Talking about Jewishness hardly interests me at all. It's a kind of sensibility that makes, say, *The Anatomy Lesson* Jewish, if anything does: the nervousness, the excitability, the arguing, the dramatizing, the indignation, the obsessiveness, the touchiness, the play-acting—above all the *talking*. The talking and the shouting. Jews will go on, you know. It isn't what it's talking *about* that makes a book Jewish—it's that the book won't shut up. The book won't leave you alone. Won't let up. Gets too close. "Listen, listen—that's only the half of it!" I knew what I was doing when I broke Zuckerman's jaw. For a Jew a broken jaw is a terrible tragedy. It was to avoid this that so many of us went into teaching rather than prizefighting.

INTERVIEWER

Why is Milton Appel, the good, high-minded Jew who was a guru for Zuckerman in his early years, a punching-bag in *The Anatomy Lesson*, someone that Zuckerman wants to desanctify?

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ROTH

If I were not myself, if someone else had been assigned the role of being Roth and writing his books, I might very well, in this other incarnation, have been his Milton Appel.

INTERVIEWER

Is Zuckerman's rage at Milton Appel the expression of a kind of guilt on your part?

ROTH

Guilt? Not at all. As a matter of fact, in an earlier draft of the book, Zuckerman and his young girlfriend Diana took exactly opposite positions in their argument about Appel. She, with all her feisty inexperience, said to Zuckerman, "Why do you let him push you around, why do you take this shit sitting down?" and Zuckerman, the older man, said to her, "Don't be ridiculous, Dear, calm down, he doesn't matter." There was the real autobiographical scene, and it had no life at all. I had to absorb the rage into the main character even if my own rage on this topic had long since subsided. By being true to life I was actually ducking the issue. So I reversed their positions, and had the twenty-year-old college girl telling Zuckerman to grow up, and gave Zuckerman the tantrum. Much more fun. I wasn't going to get anywhere with a Zuckerman as eminently reasonable as myself.

INTERVIEWER

So your hero always has to be enraged or in trouble or complaining.

ROTH

My hero has to be in a state of vivid transformation or radical displacement. "I am not what I am—I am, if anything, what I am not!" The litany begins something like that.

INTERVIEWER

How conscious are you as you are writing of whether you are moving from a third to a first person narrative?

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ROTH

It's not conscious or unconscious—the movement is spontaneous.

INTERVIEWER

But how does it feel, to be writing in the third person as opposed to the first person?

ROTH

How does it feel looking through a microscope, when you adjust the focus? Everything depends upon how close you want to bring the naked object to the naked eye. And vice versa. Depends on what you want to magnify, and to what power.

INTERVIEWER

But do you free yourself in certain ways by putting Zuckerman in the third person?

ROTH

I free myself to say about Zuckerman what it would be inappropriate for him to say about himself in quite the same way. The irony would be lost in the first person, or the comedy; I can introduce a note of gravity that might be jarring coming from him. The shifting within a single narrative from the one voice to the other is how a reader's moral perspective is determined. It's something like this that we all want to do in ordinary conversation when we employ the indefinite pronoun "one" in speaking of ourselves. Using "one" places your observation in a looser relationship to the self that's uttering it. Look, sometimes it's more telling to let him speak for himself, sometimes it's more telling to speak about him; sometimes it's more telling to narrate obliquely, sometimes not. *The Ghost Writer* is narrated in the first person, probably because what's being described is largely a world Zuckerman's discovered outside of himself, the book of a young explorer. The older and more scarred he gets, the more *inward*-looking he gets, the further out *I* have to get. The crisis of solipsism he suffers in *The Anatomy Lesson* is better seen from a bit of a distance.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you direct yourself as you are writing to make distinctions between what is spoken and what is narrative?

ROTH

I don't "direct" myself. I respond to what seem the liveliest possibilities. There's no necessary balance to be achieved between what is spoken and what is narrated. You go with what's alive. Two thousand pages of narrative and six lines of dialogue may be just the ticket for one writer, and two thousand pages of dialogue and six lines of narrative the solution for another.

INTERVIEWER

Do you ever take long chunks that have been dialogue and make them into narrative, or the other way around?

ROTH

Sure. I did that with the Anne Frank section of *The Ghost Writer*. I had trouble getting that right. When I began, in the third person, I was somehow *revering* the material. I was taking a high elegiac tone in telling the story of Anne Frank surviving and coming to America. I didn't know where I was going so I began by doing what you're supposed to do when writing the life of a saint. It was the tone appropriate to hagiography. Instead of Anne Frank gaining new meaning within the context of my story, I was trying to draw from the ready store of stock emotions that everybody is supposed to have about her. It's what even good actors sometimes will do during the first weeks of rehearsing a play—gravitate to the conventional form of presentation, cling to the cliché while anxiously waiting for something authentic to take hold. In retrospect, my difficulties look somewhat bizarre, because just what Zuckerman was fighting against, I was in fact succumbing to—the officially authorized and most consoling legend. I tell you, no one who later complained that in *The Ghost Writer* I had abused the memory of Anne Frank would have batted an eye had I let those banalities out into the world. That would have been just fine; I might even have got a citation. But I couldn't have given myself any

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prizes for it. The difficulties of telling a Jewish story—How should it be told? In what tone? To whom should it be told? To what end? Should it be told at all?—was finally to become *The Ghost Writer*'s theme. But before it became a theme, it apparently had to be an ordeal. It often happens, at least with me, that the struggles that generate a book's moral life are naively enacted upon the body of the book during the early, uncertain stages of writing. That *is* the ordeal, and it ended when I took that whole section and recast it in the first person—Anne Frank's story told by Amy Bellette. The victim wasn't herself going to talk about her plight in the voice of "The March of Time." She hadn't in the *Diary*, so why should she in life? I didn't want this section to *appear* as first person narration, but I knew that by passing it through the first person sieve, I stood a good chance of getting rid of this terrible tone, which wasn't hers, but mine. I did get rid of it. The impassioned cadences, the straining emotions, the somber, overdramatized, archaic diction—I cleared it all out, thanks to Amy Bellette. Rather straightforwardly, I then cast the section *back* into the third person, and then I was able to get to work on it—to write rather than to rhapsodize or eulogize.

INTERVIEWER

How do you think you have influenced the environment, the culture, as a writer?

ROTH

Not at all. If I had followed my early college plans to become an attorney, I don't see where it would matter to the culture.

INTERVIEWER

Do you say that with bitterness or with glee?

ROTH

Neither. It's a fact of life. In an enormous commercial society that demands complete freedom of expression, the cul-

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ture is a maw. Recently, the first American novelist to receive a special Congressional Gold Medal for his "contribution to the nation" was Louis L'Amour. It was presented to him at the White House by the President. The only other country in the world where such a writer would receive his government's highest award is the Soviet Union. In a totalitarian state, however, *all* culture is dictated by the regime; fortunately we in America live in Reagan's and not Plato's Republic, and aside from their stupid medal, culture is almost entirely ignored. And that is preferable by far. As long as those on top keep giving the honors to Louis L'Amour and couldn't care less about anything else, everything will be just fine. When I was first in Czechoslovakia, it occured to me that I work in a society where as a writer everything goes and nothing matters, while for the Czech writers I met in Prague, nothing goes and everything matters. This isn't to say I wished to change places. I didn't envy them their persecution and the way in which it heightens their social importance. I didn't even envy them their seemingly more valuable and serious themes. The trivialization, in the West, of much that's deadly serious in the East is itself a subject, one requiring considerable imaginative ingenuity to transform into compelling fiction. To write a serious book that doesn't signal its seriousness with the rhetorical cues or thematic gravity that's traditionally associated with seriousness is a worthy undertaking too. To do justice to a spiritual predicament which is *not* blatantly shocking and monstrously horrible, which does *not* elicit universal compassion, or occur on a large historical stage, or on the grandest scale of twentieth century suffering—well, that's the lot that has fallen to those who write where everything goes and nothing matters. I recently heard the critic George Steiner, on English television, denouncing contemporary Western literature as utterly worthless and without quality, and claiming that the great documents of the human soul, the masterpieces, could only arise from souls being crushed by regimes like those in Czechoslovakia. I wonder then why all the writers I know in Czechoslovakia loathe the regime and passionately wish that

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it would disappear from the face of the earth. Don't they understand, as Steiner does, that this is their chance to be great? Sometimes one or two writers with colossal brute strength do manage, miraculously, to survive and, taking the system as their subject, to make art of a very high order out of their persecution. But most of them who remain sealed up inside totalitarian states are, as writers, destroyed by the system. That system doesn't make masterpieces; it makes coronaries, ulcers, and asthma, it makes alcoholics, it makes depressives, it makes bitterness and desperation and insanity. The writers are intellectually disfigured, spiritually demoralized, physically sickened, and culturally bored. Frequently they are silenced completely. Nine-tenths of the best of them will never do their best work just because of the system. The writers nourished by this sytem are the party hacks. When such a system prevails for two or three generations, relentlessly grinding away at a community of writers for twenty, thirty, or forty years, the obsessions become fixed, the language grows stale, the readership slowly dies out from starvation, and the existence of a national literature of originality, variety, vibrancy (which is very different from the brute survival of a single powerful voice) is nearly impossible. A literature that has the misfortune of remaining isolated underground for too long will inevitably become provincial, backwards, even naive, despite the fund of dark experience that may inspire it. By contrast, our work here hasn't been deprived of authenticity because as writers we haven't been stomped on by a totalitarian government. I don't know of any Western writer, aside from George Steiner, who is so grandiosely and sentimentally deluded about human suffering—and "masterpieces"—that he's come back from behind the Iron Curtain thinking himself devalued because he hasn't had to contend with such a wretched intellectual and literary environment. If the choice is between Louis L'Amour and our literary freedom and our extensive, lively, national literature on the one hand, and Solzhenitsyn and that cultural desert and crushing suppression on the other, I'll take L'Amour.

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INTERVIEWER

But don't you feel powerless as a writer in America?

ROTH

Writing novels is not the road to power. I don't believe that, in my society, novels effect serious changes in anyone other than the handful of people who are writers, whose own novels are of course seriously affected by other novelist's novels. I can't see anything like that happening to the ordinary reader, nor would I expect it to.

INTERVIEWER

What do novels do then?

ROTH

To the ordinary reader? Novels provide readers with something to read. At their best writers change the *way* readers read. That seems to me the only realistic expectation. It also seems to me quite enough. Reading novels is a deep and singular pleasure, a gripping and mysterious human activity that does not require any more moral or political justification than sex.

INTERVIEWER

But are there no other after-effects?

ROTH

You asked if I thought my fiction had changed anything in the culture and the answer is no. Sure there's been some scandal, but people are scandalized all the time; it's a way of life for them. It doesn't mean a thing. If you ask if I *want* my fiction to change anything in the culture, the answer is still no. What I want is to possess my readers while they are reading my book—if I can, to possess them in ways that other writers don't. Then let them return, just as they were, to a world where everybody else is working to change, persuade, tempt, and control them. The best readers come to fiction to be free of all that noise, to have set loose in them the consciousness that's otherwise conditioned and hemmed in by all that *isn't* fiction. This is some-

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thing that every child, smitten by books, understands immediately, though it's not at all a childish idea about the importance of reading.

INTERVIEWER

Last question. How would you describe yourself? What do you think you are like, compared with those vividly transforming heroes of yours?

ROTH

I am like somebody who is trying vividly to transform himself out of himself and into his vividly transforming heroes. I am very much like somebody who spends all day writing.

—**Hermione Lee**

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Herbert Morris

In the Dark

Michael at New Hope, July 4

From what facts you gave, or refrained from giving,
I have not quite been able to determine
whether a porch graces the girl's aunt's house
(gingerbread cornices, filigree arches)
where, in the evening, after talk, green tea,
after the table has been cleared, the chairs
arranged, or rearranged, lamps dimmed, the stars lit,
one moves, with the others, to take the breeze
(any merest stirring of leaves suffices),
the air smelling of dusk, of moss, of woods
to the rear, or the side, of the frame house
(directions will be useless: in the dark
all falsify, mislead, are wholly suspect);
whether the upstairs windows face the river
or look out on the towpath, the canal;
whether, at a speed reckless but triumphant,
a car, just one (all that is necessary
for this vision of farewell and departure),
negotiates the turn to River Road
effortlessly, as we foresaw it would,
as though it were the route that entered dreaming
(which, in the dark of certain nights, it is).

Small matter, you may say, and yet, all night,
remembering what I may have forgotten,
darkness in all its aspects, the sheer weight
of fragrance, summer, dreaming, on the porches,
wracked by the thought of backroads, of July

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in certain unnamed, moonlight-dappled countries,
the sweep of certain long views, placements, landscapes,
you with the road opening out before you
as tellingly as though it were your life
(which, on certain summer evenings, it is),
I dreamt of Roman candles you had brought,
wrapped with great care, no doubt, for the trip south,
unwrapped with at least equal care, arriving,
stunned by the arc they make, or would make, hurling
themselves against the limits of that sky,
haunted by rockets scrawling, over and over,
unmistakable omens on the air,
signs we decipher only when they vanish,
should we recall the shapes they took, descending,
jets, plumes, pinwheels, cascades, flames heaped on
flames.
I pictured, too, the view the bedroom offers,
flotillas of canoes making their way
up-river, down-, their hulls threading the darkness
cross-stitch by cross-stitch, patiently, in silence,
in the moonlight their prows resplendent, gleaming,
the crews anonymous, intent, their paddles
breaking water as though water were silk,
thought it possible the girl's aunt had lace
draped at the windows, lace that billows, placed
soap in the dresser drawers that they smell sweet,
imagined that, all night, the hiss of tires
on asphalt, River Road artfully plotted
at an angle just beneath where you lie,
burdens your dreaming, or becomes your dream,
keeps you awake with all that sound implies:
voyages, backroads, farewells, embarkations.

Summer is like that this year (explanations
neither asked for nor given): in the dark,
strangers addressing strangers, and by names
only those they have lived with, loved, could know;
unaccountable vistas where the road turns,

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where the prospect reveals, as one draws closer,
perspectives one has never seen before,
or perhaps half-seen, imprecisely seen,
the whole configuration startling, new,
a sudden clearing, moss, towpath, canal,
a stand of beeches poised on one embankment,
their branches reaching almost to the water,
their sense of presence luminous, pronounced,
the quality of what seems their attention
(to the wind, to the darkness, to each other)
unfaltering, relentless, undistracted,
lovely enough, one thinks, to change one's life;
on a half-landing in the girl's aunt's house,
that pause between remember and forget
on the ascent to second stories, attics,
those rooms abandoned, those closets sealed off,
their doors, inevitably, bolted, shuttered
("This section of the house need not concern us"),
a weak spot where the floorboard sags, a creak,
though one recalls no weakness here before,
a threadbare patch of star-tread, grease-soaked, streaked,
opening suddenly beneath one's feet,
though the flight was intact the night we came;
a small, all-but-unnoticeable flaw
in the wallpaper leading to the hall,
some subtle interruption of the pattern
(gentian and cabbage roses on a trellis),
time-stain, light-mark, weather-discoloration,
as though a picture which had hung here once,
a photograph, perhaps, of someone lost,
someone from the past, husband, brother, lover,
the eyes gone yellow, the mouth rimmed with dust,
had been removed just before one's arrival,
for reasons neither questioned nor disclosed;
at some still quite fair distance from the car,
a figure walking River Road, ahead
(it is late, and the night lies windless, calm),

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wearing a hat, headed south, drenched with darkness,
turning back to look when he hears our motor,
splattered with moonlight leaking from the beeches,
someone we slow our speed for (Want a ride?)
only to lose him (river?, woods?, canal?),
only to find the man has disappeared;
at a table two tables from our own
in a Cuban restaurant we have entered
one night, for the first time, alone, a man,
having pondered the choices on the menu,
still undecided, visibly uncertain,
asking the waiter what he recommends,
to which the answer comes, in Cuban Spanish:
Perhaps regret over the vanished past;
on the white wicker porches, in the dark,
where we are gathered late these summer evenings
to take the breeze, to prepare, in some fashion
(the arranging of chairs, the rearranging,
the movement to positions at the rail),
for those festive nights-of-the-holiday
when fireworks are scheduled to be launched
from below us, at midnight, on the river
(jets, plumes, pinwheels, cascades, flames heaped on
flames),
the children's bedtimes postponed, or forgotten,
the memory of portraits in their frames
snatched from the wall expunged, if not their stains,
a surf of voices breaking on all sides,
rolling in on the dark, beating against us,
voices addressing us as though they knew us,
human voices, pitch-perfect, pure, intense,
unrecognizable and yet familiar,
coming from all directions (though direction
does not matter, will be made not to matter),
from the right, or the left, behind, before us,
from the porch itself, or the road beyond,
from the woods, where the dark comes down so deeply,

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telling us what we knew once, but forgot,
time, or the past, that what was possible
(one's life, perhaps) may yet be possible
here in the fierce, full darkness of these porches,
where we wait for the breeze, assailed by voices,
the words suffused with longing, made to carry
an intimacy words have never carried
in this county, beyond, a sense of risk
sitters in the dark on leaf-dappled porches
seem never to have risked, the most outrageous
poetry spilling from the mouths of madmen
who, just due north or west of here, a distance
no greater than the next village, appear
almost sane if one does not look too closely
(the way, some nights, they walk, then disappear
into the calm, clear dark from which they came),
does not ask what they dream of, what they long for.

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The Hector Quesadilla Story

T. Coraghessan Boyle

He was no Joltin' Joe, no Sultan of Swat, no Iron Man. For one thing, his feet hurt. And God knows no legendary immortal ever suffered so prosaic a complaint. He had shinsplints too, and corns and ingrown toenails and hemorrhoids. Demons drove burning spikes into his tailbone each time he bent to loosen his shoelaces, his limbs were skewed so awkwardly his elbows and knees might have been transposed and the once-proud knot of his frijole-fed belly had fallen like an avalanche. Worse: he was old. Old, old, old, the graybeard hobbling down the rough-hewn steps of the Senate building, the Ancient Mariner chewing on his whiskers and stumbling in his socks. Though they listed his birthdate as 1942 in the program, there were those who knew better: it was way back in '54, during his rookie year for San Buitre, that he had taken Asunción to the altar, and even in those distant days, even in Mexico, twelve-year-olds didn't marry.

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When he was younger—really young, nineteen, twenty, tearing up the Mexican League like a saint of the stick—his ears were so sensitive he could hear the soft rasping friction of the pitcher's fingers as he massaged the ball and dug in for a slider, fastball, or changeup. Now he could barely hear the umpire bawling the count in his ear. And his legs. How they ached, how they groaned and creaked and chattered, how they'd gone to fat! He ate too much, that was the problem. Ate prodigiously, ate mightily, ate as if there were a hidden thing inside him, a creature all of jaws with an infinite trailing ribbon of gut. Huevos con chorizo with beans, tortillas, camarones in red sauce and a twelve-ounce steak for breakfast, the chicken in mole to steady him before afternoon games, a sea of beer to wash away the tension of the game and prepare his digestive machinery for the flaming machaca and pepper salad Asunción prepared for him in the blessed evenings of the home stand.

Five foot seven, one hundred eighty-nine and three-quarters pounds. Hector Hernán Jesus y María Quesadilla. Little Cheese, they called him. Cheese, Cheese, Cheesus, went up the cry as he stepped in to pinch-hit in some late inning crisis, Cheese, Cheese, Cheesus, building to a roar until Chavez Ravine resounded as if with the holy name of the Savior Himself when he stroked one of the clean line-drive singles that were his signature or laid down a bunt that stuck like a finger in jelly. When he fanned, when the bat went loose in the fat brown hands and he went down on one knee for support, they hissed and called him *Viejo*.

One more season, he tells himself, though he hasn't played regularly for nearly ten years and can barely trot to first after drawing a walk, One more. He tells Asunción too: One more, One more, as they sit in the gleaming kitchen of their house in Boyle Heights, he with his Carta Blanca, she with her mortar and pestle for grinding the golden petrified kernels of maize into flour for the tortillas he eats like peanuts. *Una más*, she mocks. What do you want, the Hall of Fame? Hang up your spikes Hector.

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He stares off into space, his mother's Indian features flattening his own as if the legend were true, as if she really had taken a spatula to him in the cradle, and then, dropping his thick lids as he takes a long slow swallow from the neck of the bottle, he says: Just the other day driving home from the park I saw a car on the freeway, a Mercedes with only two seats, a girl in it, her hair out back like a cloud, and you know what the license plate said? His eyes are open now, black as pitted olives. Do you? She doesn't. Cheese, he says. It said Cheese.

Then she reminds him that Hector Jr. will be twenty-nine next month and that Reina has four children of her own and another on the way. You're a grandfather, Hector—almost a great-grandfather if your son ever settled down. A moment slides by, filled with the light of the sad waning sun and the harsh Yucatano dialect of the radio announcer. *Hombres* on first and third, one down. *Abuelo*, she hisses, grinding stone against stone until it makes his teeth ache. Hang up your spikes, *abuelo.*

But he doesn't. He can't. He won't. He's no grandpa with hair the color of cigarette stains and a blanket over his knees, he's no toothless old gasser sunning himself in the park—he's a big leaguer, proud wearer of the Dodger blue, wielder of stick and glove. How can he get old? The grass is always green, the lights always shining, no clocks or periods or halves or quarters, no punch-in and punch-out: This is the game that never ends. When the heavy hitters have fanned and the pitchers' arms gone sore, when there's no joy in Mudville, taxes are killing everybody and the Russians are raising hell in Guatemala, when the manager paces the dugout like an attack dog, mind racing, searching high and low for the canny veteran to go in and do single combat, there he'll be—always, always, eternal as a monument—Hector Quesadilla, utility infielder, with the .296 lifetime batting average and service with the Reds, Phils, Cubs, Royals, and L.A. Dodgers.

So he waits. Hangs on. Trots his aching legs round the outfield grass before the game, touches his toes ten agonizing times each morning, takes extra batting practice with the rookies and

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slumping millionaires. Sits. Watches. Massages his feet. Waits through the scourging road trips in the Midwest and along the East Coast, down to muggy Atlanta, across to stormy Wrigley and up to frigid Candlestick, his gut clenched round an indigestible cud of meatloaf and instant potatoes and wax beans, through the terrible nightgames with the alien lights in his eyes, waits at the end of the bench for a word from the manager, for a pat on the ass, a roar, a hiss, a chorus of cheers and catcalls, the marimba pulse of bat striking ball and the sweet looping arc of the clean base hit.

And then comes a day, late in the season, the homeboys battling for the pennant with the big-stick Braves and the sneaking Jints, when he wakes from honeyed dreams in his own bed that's like an old friend with the sheets that smell of starch and soap and flowers, and feels the pain stripped from his body as if at the touch of a healer's fingertips. Usually he dreams nothing, the night a blank, an erasure, and opens his eyes on the agonies of the martyr strapped to a bed of nails. Then he limps to the toilet, makes a poor discolored water, rinses the dead taste from his mouth and staggers to the kitchen table where food, only food, can revive in him the interest in drawing another breath. He butters tortillas and folds them into his mouth, spoons up egg and melted jack cheese and frijoles refritos with the green salsa, lashes into his steak as if it were cut from the thigh of Kerensky, the Atlanta relief ace who'd twice that season caught him looking at a full-count fastball with men in scoring position. But not today. Today is different, a sainted day, a day on which sunshine sits in the windows like a gift of the Magi and the chatter of the starlings in the crapped-over palms across the street is a thing that approaches the divine music of the spheres. What can it be?

In the kitchen it hits him: pozole in a pot on the stove, carnitas in the saucepan, the table spread with sweetcakes, buñuelos and the little marzipan *dulces* he could kill for. *Feliz cumpleaños*, Asunción pipes as he steps through the doorway. Her face is lit with the smile of her mother, her mother's mother, the line of gift-givers descendant to the happy conquistadors and joyous Aztecs. A kiss, a *dulce* and then a knock at the door and Reina,

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fat with life, throwing her arms around him while her children gobble up the table, the room, their grandfather, with eyes that swallow their faces. Happy birthday, Daddy, Reina says, and Franklin, her youngest, is handing him the gift.

And Hector Jr.?

But he doesn't have to fret about Hector Jr., his firstborn, the boy with these same great sad eyes who'd sat in the dugout in his Reds uniform when they lived in Cincy and worshiped the pudgy icon of his father until the parish priest had to straighten him out on his hagiography, Hector Jr. who studies English at USC and day and night writes his thesis on a poet his father has never heard of, because here he is, walking in the front door with his mother's smile and a store-wrapped gift—a book, of course. Then Reina's children line up to kiss the *abuelo*—they'll be sitting in the box seats this afternoon—and suddenly he knows so much: He will play today, he will hit, oh yes, can there be a doubt? He sees it already. Kerensky, the son of a whore. Extra innings. Koerner or Manfredonia or Brooksie on third. The ball like an orange, a mango, a muskmelon, the clean swipe of the bat, the delirium of the crowd, and the gimpy *abuelo*, a big leaguer still, doffing his cap and taking a tour of the bases in a stately trot, Sultan for a day.

Could things ever be so simple?

In the bottom of the ninth, with the score tied at five and Reina's kids full of Coke, hotdogs, peanuts, and ice cream and getting restless, with Asunción clutching her rosary as if she were drowning and Hector Jr.'s nose stuck in some book, Dupuy taps him to hit for the pitcher with two down and Fast Freddie Phelan on second. The eighth man in the lineup, Spider Martinez from Muchas Vacas, D.R., has just whiffed on three straight pitches and Corcoran, the Braves' left-handed relief man, is all of a sudden pouring it on. Throughout the stadium a hush has fallen over the crowd, the torpor of suppertime, the game poised at apogee. Shadows are lengthening in the outfield, swallows flitting across the face of the scoreboard, here a fan drops into his beer, there a big mama gathers up her purse,

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her knitting, her shopping bags and parasol and thinks of dinner. Hector sees it all. This is the moment of catharsis, the moment to take it out.

As Martinez slumps toward the dugout, Dupuy, a laconic, embittered man who keeps his suffering inside and drinks Gelusil like water, takes hold of Hector's arm. His eyes are red-rimmed and paunchy, doleful as a basset hound's. Bring the runner in, Champ, he rasps. First pitch fake a bunt, then hit away. Watch Booger at third. Uh-huh, Hector mumbles, snapping his gum. Then he slides his bat from the rack—white ash, tape-wrapped grip, personally blessed by the Archbishop of Guadalajara and his twenty-seven acolytes—and starts for the dugout steps, knowing the course of the next three minutes as surely as his blood knows the course of his veins. The familiar cry will go up—Cheese, Cheese, Cheesus—and he'll amble up to the batter's box, knocking imaginary dirt from his spikes, adjusting the straps of his golf gloves, tugging at his underwear and fiddling with his batting helmet. His face will be impenetrable. Corcoran will work the ball in his glove, maybe tip back his cap for a little hair grease and then give him a look of psychopathic hatred. Hector has seen it before. Me against you. My record, my career, my house, my family, my life, my mutual funds and beer distributorship against yours. He's been hit in the elbow, the knee, the groin, the head. Nothing fazes him. Nothing. Murmuring a prayer to Santa Griselda, patroness of the sun-blasted Sonoran village where he was born like a heat blister on his mother's womb, Hector Hernán Jesus y María Quesadilla will step into the batter's box, ready for anything.

But it's a game of infinite surprises.

Before Hector can set foot on the playing field, Corcoran suddenly doubles up in pain, Phelan goes slack at second and the catcher and shortstop are hustling out to the mound, tailed an instant later by trainer and pitching coach. First thing Hector thinks is a groin pull, then appendicitis, and finally, as Corcoran goes down on one knee, poison. He'd once seen a man shot in the gut at Obregon City, but the report had been loud as a thunderclap and he hears nothing now but the enveloping

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hum of the crowd. Corcoran is rising shakily, the trainer and pitching coach supporting him while the catcher kicks meditatively in the dirt, and now Mueller, the Atlanta *cabeza*, is striding big-bellied out of the dugout, head down as if to be sure his feet are following orders. Halfway to the mound, Mueller flicks his right hand across his ear quick as a horse flicking its tail, and it's all she wrote for Corcoran.

Poised on the dugout steps like a bird dog, Hector waits, his eyes riveted on the bullpen. Please, he whispers, praying for the intercession of the Niño and pledging a hundred votary candles—at least, at least. Can it be? Yes, milk of my Mother, yes—Kerensky himself strutting out onto the field like a fighting cock. Kerensky!

Come to the birthday boy, Kerensky, he murmurs, so certain he's going to put it in the stands he could point like the immeasurable Bambino. His tired old legs shuffle with impatience as Kerensky stalks across the field, and then he's turning to pick Asunción out of the crowd. She's on her feet now, Reina too, the kids come alive beside her. And Hector Jr., the book forgotten, his face transfigured with the look of rapture he used to get when he was a boy sitting on the steps of the dugout. Hector can't help himself: He grins and gives them the thumbs-up sign.

Then, as Kerensky fires his warm-up smoke, the loudspeaker crackles and Hector emerges from the shadow of the dugout into the tapering golden shafts of the late-afternoon sun. That pitch, I want that one, he mutters, carrying his bat like a javelin and shooting a glare at Kerensky, but something's wrong here, the announcer's got it screwed up: BATTING FOR RARITAN, NUMBER THIRTY-NINE, DAVE TOOL. What the—? And now somebody's tugging at his sleeve and he's turning to gape with incomprehension at the freckle-faced batboy, Dave Tool striding out of the dugout with his big forty-two ounce stick, Dupuy's face locked up like a vault and the crowd, on its feet, chanting Tool, Tool, Tool! For a moment he just stands there, frozen with disbelief. Then Tool is brushing by him and the idiot of a batboy is leading him toward the dugout as if he were an old blind fisherman poised on the edge of the dock.

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He feels as if his legs have been cut from under him. Tool! Dupuy is yanking him for Tool? For what? So he can play the lefty-righty percentages like some chess head or something? Tool, of all people. Tool, with his thirty-five home runs a season and lifetime B.A. of .234, Tool who's worn so many uniforms they had to expand the league to make room for him, what's he going to do? Raging, Hector flings down his bat and comes at Dupuy like a cat tossed in a bag. You crazy, you jerk, he sputters. I woulda hit him, I woulda won the game. I dreamed it. And then, his voice breaking: It's my birthday for Christ's sake!

But Dupuy can't answer him, because on the first pitch Tool slams a real worm burner to short and the game is going into extra innings.

By seven o'clock, half the fans have given up and gone home. In the top of the fourteenth, when the visitors came up with a pair of runs on a two-out pinch-hit home run, there was a real exodus, but then the Dodgers struck back for two to knot it up again. Then it was three up and three down, regular as clockwork. Now, at the end of the nineteenth, with the score deadlocked at seven all and the players dragging themselves around the field like gutshot horses, Hector is beginning to think he may get a second chance after all. Especially the way Dupuy's been using up players like some crazy general on the western front, yanking pitchers, juggling his defense, throwing in pinch runners and pinch hitters until he's just about gone through the entire roster. Asunción is still there among the faithful, the foolish, and the self-deluded, fumbling with her rosary and mouthing prayers for Jesus Christ Our Lord, the Madonna, Hector, the hometeam, and her departed mother, in that order. Reina too, looking like the survivor of some disaster, Franklin and Alfredo asleep in their seats, the niñitas gone off somewhere—for Coke and dogs, maybe. And Hector Jr. looks like he's going to stick it out too, though he should be back in his closet writing about the mystical so-and-so and the way he illustrates his poems with gods and men and serpents. Watching him, Hector can feel his heart turn over.

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In the bottom of the twentieth, with one down and Gilley on first—he's a starting pitcher but Dupuy sent him in to run for Manfredonia after Manfredonia jammed his ankle like a turkey and had to be helped off the field—Hector pushes himself up from the bench and ambles down to where Dupuy sits in the corner, contemplatively spitting a gout of tobacco juice and saliva into the drain at his feet. Let me hit, Bernard, come on, Hector says, easing down beside him.

Can't, comes the reply, and Dupuy never even raises his head. Can't risk it, Champ. Look around you—and here the manager's voice quavers with uncertainty, with fear and despair and the dull edge of hopelessness— I got nobody left. I hit you, I got to play you.

No, No, you don't understand—I'm going to win it, *I* swear.

And then the two of them, like old bankrupts on a bench in Miami Beach, look up to watch Phelan hit into a double play.

A buzz runs through the crowd when the Dodgers take the field for the top of the twenty-second. Though Phelan is limping, Thorkelsson's asleep on his feet and Dorfman, fresh on the mound, is the only pitcher left on the roster, the moment is electric. One more inning and they tie the record set by the Mets and Giants back in '64, and then they're making history. Drunk, sober, and then drunk again, saturated with fats and nitrates and sugar, the crowd begins to come to life. Go Dodgers! Eat shit! Yo Mama! Phelan's a bum!

Hector can feel it too. The rage and frustration that had consumed him back in the ninth are gone, replaced by a dawning sense of wonder—he could have won it then, yes, and against his nemesis Kerensky too—but the Niño and Santa Griselda have been saving him for something greater. He sees it now, knows it in his bones: He's going to be the hero of the longest game in history.

As if to bear him out, Dorfman, the kid from Albuquerque, puts in a good inning, cutting the bushed Braves down in order. In the dugout, Doc Pusser, the team physician, is handing out the little green pills that keep your eyes open and Dupuy is

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blowing into a cup of coffee and staring morosely out at the playing field. Hector watches as Tool, who'd stayed in the game at first base, fans on three straight pitches, then he shoves in beside Dorfman and tells the kid he's looking good out there. With his big cornhusker's ears and nose like a tweezer, Dorfman could be a caricature of the green rookie. He says nothing. Hey, don't let it get to you, kid—I'm going to win this one for you. Next inning or maybe the inning after. Then he tells him how he saw it in a vision and how it's his birthday and the kid's going to get the victory, one of the biggest of all time. Twenty-four, twenty-five innings maybe.

Hector had heard of a game once in the Mexican League that took three days to play and went seventy-three innings, did Dorfman know that? It was down in Culiacán. Chito Martí, the converted bullfighter, had finally ended it by dropping down dead of exhaustion in centerfield, allowing Sexto Silvestro, who'd broken his leg rounding third, to crawl home with the winning run. But Hector doesn't think this game will go that long. Dorfman sighs and extracts a bit of wax from his ear as Pantaleo, the third string catcher, hits back to the pitcher to end the inning. I hope not, he says, uncoiling himself from the bench, my arm'd fall off.

Ten o'clock comes and goes. Dorfman's still in there, throwing breaking stuff and a little smoke at the Braves, who look as if they just stepped out of *Night of the Living Dead.* The hometeam isn't doing much better. Dupuy's run through the whole team but for Hector, and three or four of the guys have been in there since two in the afternoon; the rest are a bunch of ginks and gimps who can barely stand up. Out in the stands, the fans look grim. The vendors ran out of beer an hour back, and they haven't had dogs or kraut or Coke or anything since eight-thirty.

In the bottom of the twenty-seventh Phelan goes berserk in the dugout and Dupuy has to pin him to the floor while Doc Pusser shoves something up his nose to calm him. Next inning the balls-and-strikes ump passes out cold and Dorfman, who's beginning to look a little fagged, walks the first two batters

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but manages to weasel his way out of the inning without giving up the go-ahead run. Meanwhile, Thorkelsson has been dropping ice cubes down his trousers to keep awake, Martinez is smoking something suspicious in the can and Ferenc Fortnoi, the third baseman, has begun talking to himself in a tortured Slovene dialect. For his part, Hector feels stronger and more alert as the game goes on. Though he hasn't had a bite since breakfast he feels impervious to the pangs of hunger, as if he were preparing himself, mortifying his flesh like a saint in the desert.

And then, in the top of the thirty-first, with half the fans asleep and the other half staring into nothingness like the inmates of the asylum of Our Lady of Guadeloupe where Hector had once visited his halfwit uncle when he was a boy, Pluto Morales cracks one down the first base line and Tool flubs it. Right away it looks like trouble, because Chester Bubo is running around right field looking up at the sky like a bird-watcher while the ball snakes through the grass, caroms off his left foot and coasts like silk to the edge of the warning track. Morales meanwhile is rounding second and coming on for third, running in slow motion, flat-footed and hump-backed, his face drained of color, arms flapping like the undersized wings of some big flightless bird. It's not even close. By the time Bubo can locate the ball, Morales is ten feet from the plate, pitching into a face-first slide that's at least three parts collapse and that's it, the Braves are up by one. It looks black for the hometeam. But Dorfman, though his arm has begun to swell like a sausage, shows some grit, bears down and retires the side to end the historic top of the unprecedented thirty-first inning.

Now, at long last, the hour has come. It'll be Bubo, Dorfman, and Tool for the Dodgers in their half of the inning, which means that Hector will hit for Dorfman. I been saving you, Champ, Dupuy rasps, the empty Gelusil bottle clenched in his fist like a hand grenade. Go on in there, he murmurs and his voice fades away to nothing as Bubo pops the first pitch up in back of the plate. Go on in there and do your stuff.

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Sucking in his gut, Hector strides out onto the brightly-lit field like a nineteen-year-old, the familiar cry in his ears, the haggard fans on their feet, a sickle moon sketched in overhead as if in some cartoon strip featuring drunken husbands and the milkman. Asunción looks as if she's been nailed to the cross, Reina wakes with a start and shakes the little ones into consciousness and Hector Jr. staggers to his feet like a battered middleweight coming out for the fifteenth round. They're all watching him. The fans whose lives are like empty sacks, the wife who wants him home in front of the TV, his divorced daughter with the four kids and another on the way, his son, pride of his life, who reads for the doctor of philosophy while his crazy *padrecito* puts on a pair of long stockings and chases around after a little white ball like a case of arrested development. He'll show them. He'll show them some *cojones*, some true grit and desire: The game's not over yet.

On the mound for the Braves is Bo Brannerman, a big mustachioed machine of a man, normally a starter but pressed into desperate relief service tonight. A fine pitcher—Hector would be the first to admit it—but he just pitched two nights ago and he's worn thin as wire. Hector steps up to the plate, feeling legendary. He glances over at Tool in the on-deck circle, and then down at Booger, the third base coach. All systems go. He cuts at the air twice and then watches Brannerman rear back and release the ball: Strike one. Hector smiles. Why rush things? Give them a thrill. He watches a low outside slider that just about bounces to even the count, and then stands there like a statue as Brannerman slices the corner of the plate for strike two. From the stands, a chant of *Viejo*, *Viejo*, and Asunción's piercing soprano, Hit him, Hector!

Hector has no worries, the moment eternal, replayed through games uncountable, with pitchers who were over the hill when he was a rookie with San Buitre, with pups like Brannerman, with big leaguers and Hall of Famers. Here it comes, Hector, ninety-two m.p.h., the big *gringo* trying to throw it by you, the matchless wrists, the flawless swing, one terrific moment of suspended animation—and all of a sudden you're starring in your own movie.

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How does it go? The ball cutting through the night sky like a comet, arching high over the centerfielder's hapless scrambling form to slam off the wall while your legs churn up the base paths, rounding first in a gallop, taking second and heading for third . . . but wait, you spill hot coffee on your hand and you can't feel it, the demons apply the live wire to your tailbone, the legs give out and they cut you down at third while the stadium erupts in howls of execration and abuse and the *niñitos* break down, faces flooded with tears of humiliation, Hector Jr. turning his back in disgust, and Asuncion raging like harpie, *Abuelo! Abuelo! Abuelo!*

Stunned, shrunken, humiliated, you stagger back to the dugout in a maelstrom of abuse, paper cups, flying spittle, your life a waste, the game a cheat, and then, crowning irony, that bum Tool, worthless all the way back to his washerwoman grandmother and the drunken muttering whey-faced tribe that gave him suck, stands tall like a giant and sends the first pitch out of the park to tie it. Oh, the pain. Flat feet, fire in your legs, your poor tired old heart skipping a beat in mortification. And now Dupuy, red in the face, shouting: The game could be over but for you, you crazy gimpy old beaner washout! You want to hide in your locker, bury yourself under the shower room floor, but you have to watch as the next two men reach base and you pray with fervor that they'll score and put an end to your debasement. But no, Thorkelsson whiffs and the new inning dawns as inevitably as the new minute, the new hour, the new day, endless, implacable, world without end.

But wait, wait: Who's going to pitch? Dorfman's out, there's nobody left, the astonishing thirty-second inning is marching across the scoreboard like an invading army and suddenly Dupuy is standing over you—no, no, he's down on one knee, begging. Hector, he's saying, didn't you use to pitch down in Mexico when you were a kid, didn't I hear that someplace? Yes, you're saying, yes, but that was—

And then you're out on the mound, in command once again, elevated like some half-mad old king in a play, and throwing smoke. The first two batters go down on strikes and

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the fans are rabid with excitement, Asunción will raise a shrine, Hector Jr. worships you more than all the poets that ever lived, but can it be? You walk the next three and then give up the grand slam to little Tommy Oshimisi! Mother of God, will it never cease? But wait, wait, wait: Here comes the bottom of the thirty-second and Brannerman's wild. He walks a couple, gets a couple out, somebody reaches on an infield single and the bases are loaded for you, Hector Quesadilla, stepping up to the plate now like the Iron Man himself. The wind-up, the delivery, the ball hanging there like a *piñata*, like a birthday gift, and then the stick flashes in your hands like an archangel's sword, and the game goes on forever.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

T. Coraghessan Boyle is the first winner of the John Train Humor Prize for his story, "The Hector Quesadilla Story," published in this issue. His recent novel, *Budding Prospects*, was published by Viking Press in 1984. He lives in California.

Lars Gufstafsson, a Swedish writer, is the author of *Death of a Beekeeper* and a forthcoming novel, *Sigismund*, both published by New Directions. "Water Story" is from a collection of short stories, *Tales of Happy People*, due to be published by New Directions in 1986. Gufstafsson's translator, **John Weinstock**, is an Associate Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Texas at Austin.

Bobbie Ann Mason is the author of *Shiloh and Other Stories*, published in 1982 by Harper & Row.

Norman Rush's stories have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, and in *Best American Short Stories of 1983*, published by Houghton Mifflin. He is currently working on a novel. He and his wife lived in Africa from 1978 to 1983.

POETRY

Sharona Ben-Tov, a graduate student in English at Stanford University, is the fourth winner of the Bernard F. Conners Poetry Prize for "Carillon for Cambridge Women," published in this issue. Her first book of poems will be published by Harper & Row next year.

Harold Brodkey's novel, *The Party of Animals*, will be published by Knopf in 1985. Vintage Books will reissue his book of stories, *First Love*, next fall.

Joseph Brodsky's book-length poem, *Gorbunov and Gorchakov*, published in this issue, will be released by Farrar, Straus & Giroux next year. A volume of his essays is also due soon. **Harry Thomas** lives in Medford, Massachusetts, with his wife and two sons. His poetry, translations, and essays have appeared in numerous journals.

Raymond Carver has returned to poetry after a hiatus of some years. The poems in this issue will be included in *Where Water Comes Together with Other Water* (Random House, 1985). He lives with Tess Gallagher in Syracuse, New York, and Port Angeles, Washington.

Linda Gregg lives in Northampton, Massachusetts. The poems in this issue are from a collection to be published next year.

Herbert Morris lives in Philadelphia. His book of poems, *Peru*, was published by Harper & Row last year.

Molly Peacock's second book, *Raw Heaven*, will be published this fall by

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Random House. She teaches at Friends Seminary in New York and is at work on a novel.
Frederick Seidel's second book of poems, *Sunrise*, published by Viking, won the 1982 Lamont Prize. He lives in New York.
David Shapiro teaches at Columbia University. "House (Blown Apart)," published in this issue, is the title poem of a new collection.
Anne Waldman is the author of many books of poetry, including, most recently, *Makeup on Empty Space*, published by Toothpaste Press. She is currently the Director of the Poetics Program at Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, where she is editing a book of homages to Ted Berrigan.
Baron Wormser's second book of poems, *Good Trembling*, will be published by Houghton Mifflin next year. He lives with his family in Mercer, Maine.

INTERVIEWS

Shusha Guppy is the London editor of *The Paris Review* and a regular contributor to the *Daily Telegraph*, British *Vogue*, and other periodicals.
Hermione Lee is a lecturer in English at the University of York. She has published books on Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, and Philip Roth. She reviews fiction for *The Observer*.
Jason Weiss lives in Paris, where he is currently finishing his first novel, *Bright Light of Shipwreck*. He is also at work on a screenplay set in Paris.

ART

Richard Diebenkorn was born in Portland, Oregon, in 1922, and lives in Santa Monica, California. His work has been exhibited internationally, including a traveling retrospective organized by the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, in 1976, recent exhibitions of etchings at Crown Point Press, Oakland, and paintings and drawings at M. Knoedler and Co., New York.
Jasper Johns was born in Augusta, Georgia, in 1930, and lives in New York. His work has been exhibited extensively, including an international traveling exhibition of paintings, drawings, and sculpture organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in 1977–78. An exhibition of recent paintings was held at the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.
Laurie Simmons lives and works in New York. Her photographs have been exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and a recent one-woman exhibition at Metro Pictures, New York.
Terry Winters was born in Brooklyn in 1949 and lives in New York. His paintings have been included in recent exhibitions at the Hayden Gallery, MIT, Cambridge, the Tate Gallery, London, and a recent one-man exhibition at Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

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ERRATUM

In issue #92 of *The Paris Review*, two pages of Yves Bonnefoy's poem, "The Clouds," appeared in reverse order. Pages 142–143 should precede pages 140–141. Those wishing a complete, corrected version of "The Clouds" can obtain one at no extra charge by writing to *The Paris Review*, 45–39 171 Place, Flushing, NY 11358.

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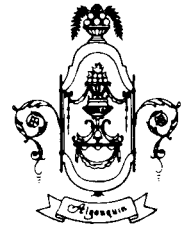

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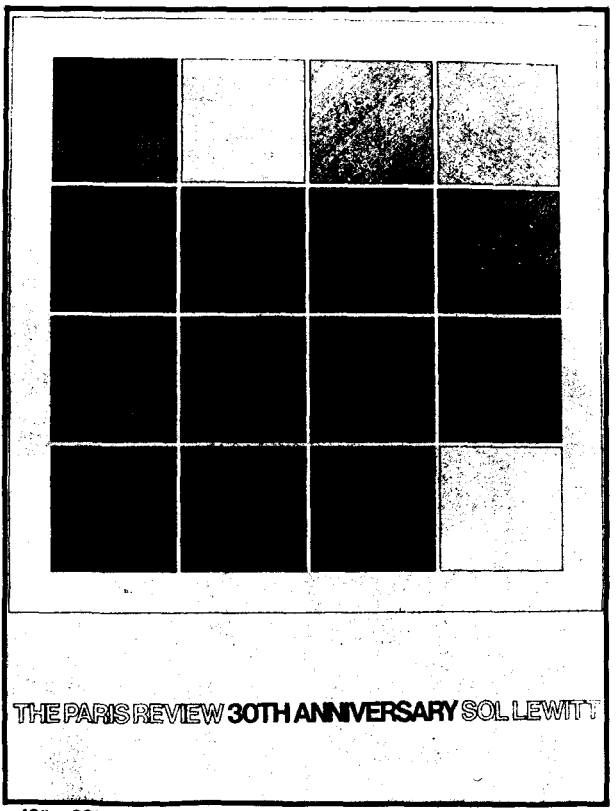

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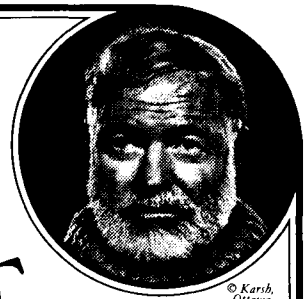

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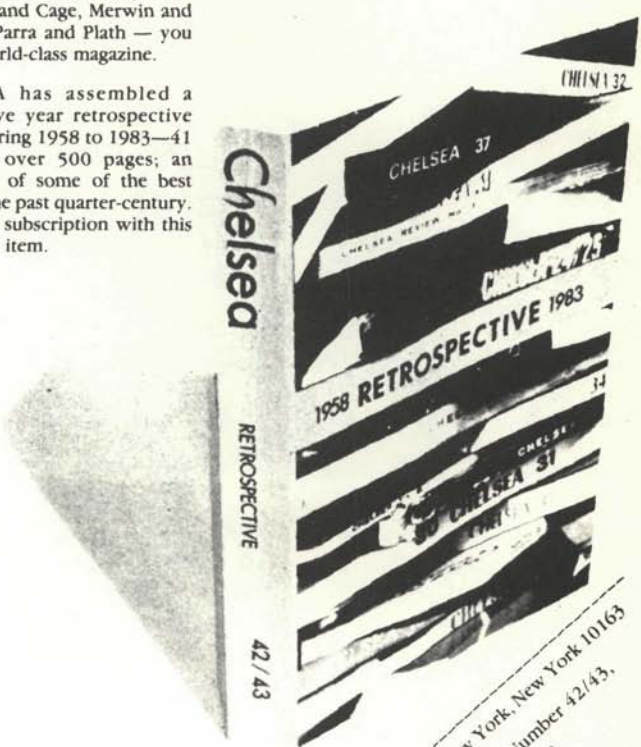

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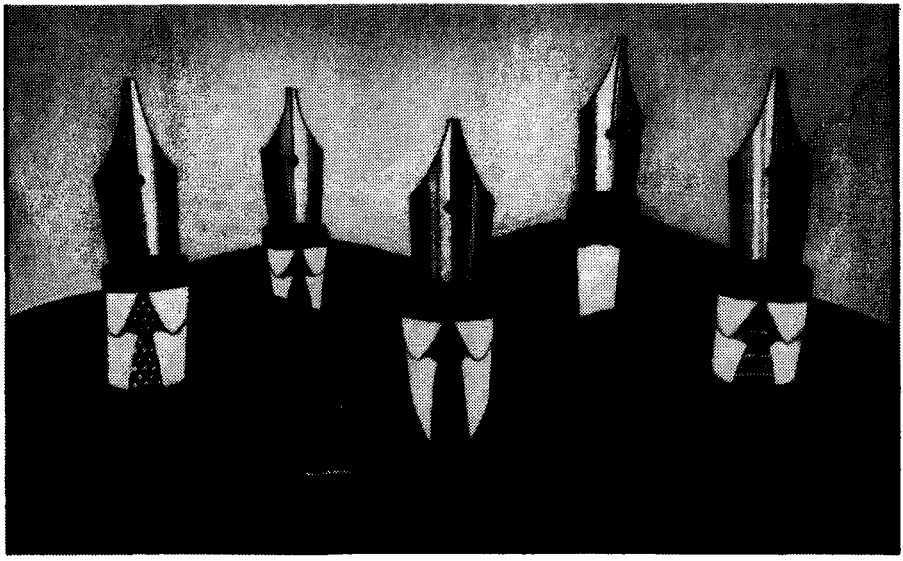

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Emily Toth, Associate Professor of English and American Studies at Penn State University, has been interested in feminism and literature since her undergraduate days at Swarthmore College. After completing her doctorate at Johns Hopkins University, she founded *The Kate Chopin Newsletter,* later retitled *Regionalism and the Female Imagination.* In addition to having published many works on women writers, American literature and women's humor, she is also the author of a biography, *Inside Peyton Place: The Life of Grace Metalious* (1981) and a historical novel, *Daughters of New Orleans* (1983).

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